

Search the Scriptures.

A
TREATISE

Shewing that all
CHRISTIANS
Ought to READ the
HOLY BOOKS;
WITH
DIRECTIONS
To them therein.

In Three PARTS.

L O N D O N,
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Introduction.

THE Holy Scriptures, as the first Homily of our Church teaches all its Children, in the very beginning of it, are such a Fountain and Well of Truth, that as many as be desirous to enter into the right and perfect way unto God, must apply their minds to be acquainted with them: without which they can neither sufficiently know God and his Will, nor their own Office and Duty. For in Holy Scripture is fully contained, what we ought to do, and what to eschew; what to believe, what to love, and what to look for at God's hands, at length. And therefore these Books ought to be much in our hands, in our eyes, in our ears, in our mouths, but most of all in our hearts.

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Unto which sort of Discourse, which is grounded upon the VI. Article of our Religion, they of the Church of Rome are wont to make a double Exception.

One is, That there are some things necessary to be believed and practised, which are not to be found there: but must be received from ancient Traditions.

The other is, That those Truths which are delivered in the Holy Scriptures, are not so clear and perspicuous, that common people should be intrusted with the reading of them.

*Now to the First of these, there hath been some time ago a plain Answer made in a Discourse about Traditions: Therefore this Treatise is intended only as an Answer to the Second Exception. For the maintaining of which they are wont to alledge, among other places, those remarkable words of St. Peter, in
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his Second Epistle, the Third Chapter, and Sixteenth Verse. Where, having made mention of St. Paul's Epistles, which treated of the same matter, that he had just before explained, he says, In which are some things hard to be understood, which they that are unlearned and unstable wrest, as they do also the other Scriptures, unto their own destruction.

Behold, say they, how dangerous it is for common people to meddle with the Holy Scriptures: which, being compared by St. Paul himself to a two edged Sword, ought not to be put into their hands, for fear they destroy themselves therewith.

It is true indeed the same St. Paul teaches us, Rom. XV. 4. that whatsoever things were written aforetime, were written for our learning: and are profitable, as he writes elsewhere, 2 Tim. III. 16. for doctrine, for reproof, for cor-

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rection, for instruction in righteousness.

But this notwithstanding, there are, say they, such difficulties and obscurities in the Holy Scriptures, as we learn from this great Apostle St. Peter, that they ought not to be thought profitable for all people; but rather hurtful to them that are ignorant: who therefore ought not to read them.

By which single Instance, the Reader may learn, if he mark it well, what sort of Interpretations of Scripture we are like to have; if we trust to them alone, and do not see with our own eyes: when these very words of St. Peter do plainly teach us the quite contrary Doctrine to that which they would establish by them.

I. For they are so far from containing a Reason why the people should not read them, that, First, they evidently suppose the common people,

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people, even the unlearned among them, did in those days read the Scriptures. Else they could not have wrested them: as the Apostle says they did; and complains of that, but not of their reading them. And

II. Secondly, These words do not affirm the whole Scripture to be hard to be understood, but only some part of it: St. Paul's Epistles at the most, or rather the things of which St. Peter had been treating. And not all of them neither, but only some things; *δυσκόντα τινα*, some few things which would require pains, and diligent attention of mind, to comprehend the meaning of them. And

III. Thirdly, The Apostle doth not say, that all who read those difficult passages, are in danger to wrest them; but only the unlearned and unstable: who abuse the plainest Truths to their own ruine. As for

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others, they may read even the hardest places in St. Paul's Epistles safely enough; nay, receive great profit from thence, as well as from other Scriptures: and they who wrest them, are not to leave reading them; but to grow in true Christian knowledge, and in Stability of mind.

These are the three Parts of the ensuing Discourse.

In treating and reading of which, Let us pray to God, (as the second Homily concludes) that we may speak, think, believe, live, and depart hence, according to the wholesome Doctrine and Verities of these holy Books. And by that means, in this World, have God's defence, favour and grace, with the unspeakable solace of peace, and quietness of Conscience; and after this miserable life, enjoy the endless Bliss and Glory of Heaven.

PART

PART I.

THat the Right of God's People to read the Holy Scriptures, is not at all prejudiced by these words of *St. Peter*, appears from hence: That the *Wrestling of the Scriptures by the unlearned and unstable*, doth suppose, that even such persons did then read them: Which overthrows the Conclusion, which they of the Roman Church, endeavour to draw from this place.

For there had been no possibility of perverting their sense, if they had not been in their hands at that time; as they are in ours now. And yet the Apostle doth not reprehend their meddling with them; but their Ignorance and their heedlessness: which was the cause they misunderstood them; and might have been prevented by a little diligence and care, without throwing them quite away.

For the fault was not there, but in themselves: who came to the perusal of holy things, with unprepared minds.

Now for the establishing of this Truth, that the people were not then, and therefore ought not now to be, debarred the liberty of reading the holy Books, (which God our Saviour hath left unto his Church, as a common Inheritance) you may be pleased to weigh these things following: which will fully settle your minds in this perswasion.

I.

First, That the ancient People of God, the Jews, were not only permitted, but required by God himself to be so conversant in the Law of *Moses*, and so well acquainted with it, as to be able to teach their Children God's Commandments: and for that end, *to talk of them when they sate in their houses, or walk by the way, when they lay down, and when they rose up; nay, to write them upon the doors of their houses, and on their gates*; that whensoever they went out or came in, they might have them before their eyes, and be put in mind of them, *Deut. VI. 6, 7, 8.*

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This the Lawgiver thought a matter of so great importance, that a little after, in the very same Book, he enjoyns it over again; for fear they should neglect it, *Chap. XI. 18, 19, 20.* For the very Root and foundation (as their Masters speak) upon which all the precepts depend, is this precept of learning the Law: which no man can imagine how they should do, to such perfection as *Moses* requires; unless they had the benefit of looking into the Book of the Law as often as they pleased.

Of which that they might be put in mind, he took care also that the Law should be read to them publicly every Sabbath day: whereby likewise, they that could not read (if there were any such among them) might be assisted to inform their Children, by hearing God's Word read unto them, in their own language.

For this is certain, that in the Synagogues, where they met, not for the Ceremonial Worship of God (which was performed only at the Temple) but for his Moral Service, *Moses* had those that preached him (or pronounced his

his Law with a loud voice) ἐν ῥησὶν ἀρχαίων, from ancient ages or generations; being read in the Synagogues every Sabbath day. They are the words of St. James, in the first Christian Council, XV. Acts 21. Where Grotius observes that it is believed, Moses himself was the Author of this practice, which the Apostle affirms had been from old times, i. e. from the time of the giving of the Law. And so Josephus expressly writes in his second Book against Appion: where he shews how Moses propounded to the Jews, the most excellent and the most necessary of all other Learning, viz. the Law: not by letting them hear it once, or twice, or thrice; but every seventh day, laying aside their other works, he commanded them to assemble together, for the hearing of the Law, and to learn it thoroughly and exactly.

For which end his Five Books were anciently divided into so many Sections, as there are weeks in the year: that the whole, by reading one Section every week, might be read over once in a year, ending at the Feast of Tabernacles. At which Feast, in the Solemn-

Solemnity of the year of Release (which was correspondent to the Sabbath, because it was the seventh of years, as that was of days) *Moses* required that there should be a more General Assembly of all *Israel* called to appear before the Lord their God; that the Law might be read to men, women, and children, and they might *hear and learn, and fear the Lord their God, and observe to do all the words of this Law*; as he speaks XXXI. *Dent.* 10, 11, 12.

Where *Moses* declaring what God had commanded him about this matter, the Hebrew Doctors understand those words (*v. 11.*) *Thou shalt read this Law before all Israel, in their hearing*, to be the Command of God to *Moses* himself, requiring him, as he did the Elders and Priests under him, to read the Law at this great Solemnity, as the Ordinary Levites did every Sabbath day. And thence they, consequently enough, conclude, that *Joshua* after his time, and the *Judges*, and the *Kings of Israel* in succeeding Ages, were bound to read publickly in this great Assembly, to as many as
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the largest Court of the Temple would hold, the principal things in the Book of *Deuteronomy*; that the people might be moved to have an higher esteem of their Law, and more reverently attend unto it. For it was of mighty force to excite the people to Religion, when the chief Authority in the Nation, not only owned it, but commended it unto them.

And because all *Israel* could not be contained in that Court of the Temple, therefore while the King was thus reading there; the *Levites*, who were specially appointed for this work, did the same in the City of *Jerusalem*: after notice had been given of their intention, by a solemn sound of Trumpets.

Thus care was taken, that what he had enjoined, *Chap. VI. 7.* should not be neglected. For if they did forget to whet the Law (as the word there signifies) upon their Childrens minds, they themselves were excited and whetted to their duty, by the sound of the Trumpets, by this solemn Convocation, by the Royal Majesty appearing to awaken their attention, and

and by his Authority pressing the Laws of God upon their Consciences.

This was the constant work also, it might be shown, of the *Prophets*; out of whose Books, there were Lessons also added in after-times; to be read together with those out of the Law of *Moses*.

How ancient this was, we do not certainly know: for some derive it from the times of *Ezra*; others think it began after the Persecution by *Antiochus Epiphanes*. Who forbidding the reading of the Law in their Synagogues, they chose some portion out of the Prophetical Books (as near to the sense of that Section, which should have been read out of the Law, as could be found) to be read in its stead: which when that Persecution was over, they thought not fit to lay aside, but continued the reading of them both. But, however that be, this is a known truth, That when our Lord himself came, and, as his custom was, went into the Synagogue on the Sabbath day, and stood up to read, He took a Lesson out of the *Prophets*, for the subject of his first Sermon at *Nazareth*,
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IV. *Luke* 16, 17. And that it was, after the reading of the Law and of the Prophets, that St. Paul stood up and preached to the Jews at *Antioch*, XIII. *Acts* 15.

From which Examples, the custom of reading two Lessons, one out of the Old Testament, and another out of the New, was very early taken up by Christians in their holy Assemblies: and continued so long in the Church, it appears by *Isidore*, and *Gratian*, that it was most worthily restored by our Learned and Pious Reformers, whose study it was, to form such an Order of Divine Service, as was most agreeable to the Primitive Patterns.

Which publick Reading was not intended to hinder their private; but to stir them up unto it. Insomuch that it is a Maxim among the *Hebrews*, That although a man had heard the Law read in the publick Assemblies on the Sabbath, yet he was bound also to read himself, the *Parascha* or Section appointed for that Week. For this is the Character which *David* gives of that Blessed man, who walks not in the way of the ungodly, *His delight is*

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is in the Law of the Lord, and in his Law doth he meditate day and night, *Psal.* I. 2. That is, saith the Commentary, under the name of *St. Hierom*, reads the Scripture perpetually, that he may do the things contained therein. And thus *Isaiah* calls upon them, in after Ages, saying, *Seek ye out the Book of the Lord, and read, no one of these shall fail, &c.* That is, when you shall hereafter see some of these things fulfilled, get a Copy of the Prophetical Books, if you want one, seek it diligently (as the word denotes) till you find it, and read; and you shall see that there is not one word of what I have said, that is not come to pass: but events shall exactly answer to these predictions.

And it is well known that *Moses* himself, in the very beginning, took particular care that the King should be furnished with a Copy of the Law, and keep it by him, that he might read therein all the days of his life, and learn to fear the Lord his God, and to keep all the words of this Law, and these Statutes, to do them, *XVII. Deut.* 18, 19. Nay, the more to imprint the words
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of this Book upon his mind, the Law enjoyns this as a duty belonging to the King himself, saying, *He shall write him a Copy of this Law in a Book, out of that which is before the Priests the Levites.* Which, though some are pleased to think a Priviledge indulged only to the King, the Jews (who are willing enough to excuse themselves from such laborious things) constantly affirm, that every private man was bound to do the same; and that though the King had done it before (as others were obliged to do) yet being exalted to the Throne, he was bound to do it over again, out of the most authentick Records; that it might be the more imprinted on his mind, and work in him a greater reverence thereof.

This *Maimonides* grounds upon those words, XXXI. *Deut.* 19. which concern them all; *Now therefore write ye this Song for you;* as if he had said, Write the Law for your selves, of which this Song is a part; for they were not wont to write the Law by parcels.

Wherein perhaps they go too far; but there is little doubt to be made, that

that pious Kings took care the people should be acquainted with the Law, as well as themselves: imitating that pious Prince *Josiah*, who after a long forgetfulness of the Holy Scriptures, having a Copy of the Law brought to him, which was found in the Temple, not only caused it to be read in the ears of the people; but (as the Jews, with great reason, affirm) commanded the Priests and Scribes to write Copies of it, and deliver them to the people. For how should they be able to perform the words of the Covenant written in that Book, unto which *Josiah* engaged them (2 *Kings* XXIII. 2, 3.) unless they knew them? And how should they know them more than they had done formerly, if they did only once barely hear them? Which might give them some present sense of their duty, but could not be remembered, unless they had the words they were to perform, constantly before their eyes.

There might much more be added on this subject, but this is sufficient to introduce what follows.

II.

THAT what was thus enjoyed by *Moses*, and practised by the people of the Jews, our *Saviour* confirmed by his Command, or, at least, by his approbation; saying, V. *John* 39. *Search the Scriptures, for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me.* Some indeed translate the words thus, *Ye search the Scriptures, for in them, &c.* and so they are a plain acknowledgment of what was then in use; nay, an approbation, if not commendation, of their diligence, in turning over the holy Books; wherein they hoped to find so great a Treasure as Eternal life. But if they be rendred as we, and as many of the *Romanists* themselves translate them, *Search the Scriptures*, then they are a Command; wherein our Blessed Saviour requires what *Moses* had formerly done, and charges them not to neglect this duty of making a diligent inquiry into the meaning of the holy Writings; for there they would find plain testimonies concerning the Messiah,

fiah, and be satisfied that he was the Christ whom they expected.

And I cannot see how this Precept may be safely disobeyed. But as our Lord in the Parable of the Rich man and *Lazarus*, XVI. *Luke* 29. brings in *Abraham*, sending the Rich mans Brethren unto *Moses and the Prophets* (i.e. to their Writings, for they themselves were dead and gone) for their instruction; from whom they might learn enough to keep them from coming into that place of Torment: So we, in like manner, ought to tell men, if they will know how to be saved, they must repair to Christ and his Apostles; and out of the Gospel, and Apostolical Instructions, learn the way to Heaven, and how to escape Eternal damnation.

For there can be no good reason alledged, why the Jews should be permitted, nay commanded to read *Moses* and the *Prophets*, and we not be allowed, but forbidden, to read the words of *Christ* and his *Apostles*. For we are as much concerned, or rather more, in these, as they were in them: and they are not harder to be understood by us, than

than the old Scriptures were by them : we have the same means , the same helps that they had , if not far better ; to profit by them , and to grow in grace , and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

And therefore it is no fault in our Preachers now , but an honest discharge of their duty , to say to their people , as *Origen* doth to his , in his second Homily upon *Isaiah* , *Would to God we did all practise that which is written , Search the Scriptures.* And as *St. Basil* (in his Second Book of Baptism , Cap. 4.) *Let us obey our Lord who saith , Search the Scriptures : and let us imitate the Apostles , who inquired of the Lord himself , the interpretation of his own words ; learning the truth and wholesomness of what He saith in one place , by what He speaks in another.*

So far were these great and Holy men , from discountenancing the reading of the Holy Scriptures ; that they most earnestly press every body to it , as I shall show more fully before I have done.

III.

LET us now further consider, that the Apostles of our Lord were concerned, that what they wrote, concerning the Christian Doctrine, should be read not only by the Elders of the Church, to whom their Writings were directed; but be communicated to all the Members thereof, who were under their Instruction.

This appears from St. Paul's most solemn Charge, in his first Epistle to the *Thessalonians*, that it should be read to all the holy Brethren, 1. v. 27. Who should read it to them, but the Bishops and Pastors of the Church? Who, no doubt, first received it; but were not to keep it to themselves, but impart it to the whole Community. And if they read it to the whole Society, we cannot think they refused to give Copies of it to them, if any desired it, that they might read it themselves. Or rather they took care to disperse this Letter of their own accord, among their Flock; as they did also send it to other Churches, where-
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by it became common to the whole Christian World

And it was a matter of such great importance, that all the people should be acquainted with his sense, that his *Charge* is in the form of an *Adjuration*. *That if they neglected him, the Command should be obeyed, for the Adjuration sake. For Adjurations were dreadful to the ancient Christians, though now, alas (wo be to us) they are little regarded.*

They are the words of *Theophylact*. And to the same effect *Theodore* glosses. *He adds an Adjuration, contriving that all might have the profit of the reading this Epistle. For perhaps otherways, they that first received it, might not have given it unto all.* As much as to say, He was afraid lest the Epistle should be suppressed, and read but by few: and therefore he requires them, for the love of God, and as they hoped for mercy from our Lord, that it should be read unto all. Which teaches us, that the Word of God ought not to be concealed from the poorest Members of the Church; who are concerned in it, as much as the greatest: And that if the Apostle were now alive

alive, and should write to the Churches, we may be confident, he would be more earnest, if it be possible, in this matter : *gravioze contestatione adjurans*, &c. (as *Musculus* writes) adding greater weight o his Adjuration : and beseeching, nay, charging the Governours of the Churches (who now with all their might oppose the peoples reading of his Epistles) that as they expected the Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, who was the Witness of what he said, and would be their Judge, they would take care that all his words should be diligently communicated to the Faithful.

It may not be amiss to take notice, that to the same purpose *S. Paul* writes also in his Epistle to the *Colossians* IV. 16. where he commands that this Epistle being read among them in that Church, they should take care to have it read in that of *Laodicea* (by sending, that is, a Copy of it to them) and the *Colossians* on the other side, should read the Epistle of the *Laodiceans* : that is, the Epistle which he had sent to that Church, as some (*Theophylact* observes) anciently understood it; or

the first Epistle to *Timothy*, which was written by him (as others, he saith, observe) from *Laodicea*.

These are plain demonstrations, that the Writings of the New Testament were intended to be the common portion of all God's people, as those of the Old had always been.

IV.

AND thus I shall now proceed to show they understood it: by representing that reading of the Scriptures was lookt upon as a Duty, and carefully practised by pious people, according to the forenamed injunction of our Blessed Lord, and the solemn obtestation of the Apostle. For the same Apostle tells us, that his Son *Timothy* from his infancy had known the Holy Scriptures; which will not now be allowed in the Roman Church to grown Christians, without a special licence: no not to *Regulars*, as they call them; whose whole business it is to be Religious, but may not have any part of the Bible, in their own Language, without a faculty from their Superiors.

Read

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Read 2 *Tim.* III. 15. and comparing it with the *fifth* verse of the *first* Chapter, you will find that he received this early knowledge he had of the Scriptures, from his Grandmother and Mother (for his Father was not a *Jew*, but a *Greek*) and therefore they were not ignorant in the Scriptures: but had made it their business to understand them so well, that they were able, according to the Law of *Moses*, to teach them their Children.

Which they began to do, saith the Apostle, *ἐκ βρέφους*, from their cradles, as we speak in our Language: that is, as *Josephus* admirably explains it, *ἐκ πρώτης ἐκείνης αἰσθήσεως*, immediately upon the first indication that they have any perception of other things. For so he writes in the Book before named, *If any man ask any one of our Nation concerning the Laws, he will tell him all things more readily than his own name: for learning them straightway, as soon as we come to have any knowledge of things, we retain them deeply ingraven upon our minds.*

Thus the *Talmudists* also discourse; *at five years old they put their Children*

to the Bible. Whereby they arrive at such a proficiency, that in these latter Ages they have been able to tell any thing that is there. So *Ribera* a famous Jesuit relates in his Commentaries upon V. *Micah* 2. 'I knew a Jew, 'saith he, at *Salamanca*, who was sufficiently unlearned, of whom when I 'inquired (in the Spanish Language, 'because he understood no Latine) about several things, both in the Historical and in the Prophetical Books, 'he stopt me immediately, upon the 'first mention of them, from proceeding further: and repeated them all 'himself, without Book, in the Hebrew Tongue. Which I relating to 'another Jew who was become Christian, he told me it was no wonder; 'for they committed all these things 'to memory from their Childhood.

Which may very well put those Christians to the blush, who are as careful and vigilant to keep not only their Children and Youth, but Elder people also from reading the Holy Scriptures, as the Jews are to bring them into acquaintance with them.

And it is the more shameful, because
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even the *Profelytes*, that is, they of other Nations, who embraced the Jewish Religion, were allowed this liberty, no less than the natural Jews themselves. Which is apparent in the History of the *Eunuch* belonging to the Queen of *Ethiopia*: whom St. *Philip* found (VIII. *Acts* 28.) reading the Prophet *Isaiah*, as he was in his journey home-ward from *Jerusalem*: agreeable to the Precept of the Law before mentioned, that the Divine Writings should be their Companions when they walkt on the way, as well as when they were within doors.

This Eunuch was a man of a strange Country, bred up in the Court of *Ethiopia*; which was the softest, they say, and most effeminate of all Nations: yet, being converted to the Jewish Religion, he had so much care of his Soul, as to read the Prophetical Books, the hardest of all the old Scriptures. The sense of which, he confessed to *Philip*, he did not understand: but that did not hinder his reading them. And because he read them with a pious mind, God sent him an Interpreter: who improved his know-

ledge, and advanced him from a Jew to be a Christian: clothing the Blackmore, as *Erasmus* expresseth it, with the Snow-like fleece of the immaculate Lamb.

Which that great Man justly alledges as an Argument, why every one should read the Scriptures, though they do not understand every thing that they read. If they do it honestly and piously, how do we know, saith he, but that they may fare as well as the Eunuch did: who felt his heart touched, in the reading, by the Spirit of God?

V.

CERTAIN it is, you may further observe, that this was not only practised in the first and best times of Christianity, but it was accounted a noble quality in those, who were seriously conversant in the Holy Scriptures. As they of the City of *Berea* may teach us: who hearing *St. Paul* preach that *Jesus* was the Christ, which he confirmed no doubt out of the Scriptures, did not presently reject what he

he said, because it crossed their Opinion, as a neighbouring City had done; but were more noble (saith the Text, XVII. *Acts* 11.) or better bred, than those of Thessalonica; searching the Scriptures daily, whether those things were so. Which is so far from being censured as a piece of presumption, that God blessed these pious endeavours, and gave them a right understanding, as a reward of their search into the Scriptures: according as it there follows, therefore many of them believed.

And thus St. Peter also, in this very Epistle (*Chap. I. 19.*) commends his Country-men; who attentively read and considered the Prophetical Writings: *We have also a more sure word of Prophecy, whereunto ye do well that ye take heed, as unto a light that shineth in a dark place, until the day dawn, and the day-star arise in your hearts.*

The plainest meaning of which words, to me, seems to be this; 'That
'it was a laudable and praise-worthy
'thing in those Jewish Converts to
'whom he writes (who as yet were
'but weak in the Faith) that they did

'give heed to the Writings of the an-
 'cient Prophets; which they took to
 'be the surest ground of their Faith:
 'for in them they would find the Lord
 'Jesus plainly described, if they com-
 'pared what the Apostles preached
 'with that which they foretold, as the
 'Beraans did. Those Writings in-
 'deed of the Prophets, did but ob-
 'scurely treat of Christ, in compari-
 'son with the discoveries of him in the
 'Gospel, and the Apostolical Writings
 '(which he compares to the *Day-star*,
 'and the old Prophets but to a *Candle*
 '*shining in a dark place*) yet the one
 'would lead them to the other; and
 'by taking attentive heed to the Pro-
 'phetical Writings, they would in
 'time find the *day dawn*, and the *Day-*
 '*star arise in their hearts*: that is, ar-
 'rive by degrees at clearer demonstra-
 'tions, and a fuller and brighter know-
 'ledge of Christian Truths, delivered
 'by our Saviour and his Apostles: who
 'being the *Light of the World*, gave
 'light even to the ancient Prophe-
 'cies.

To conclude this particular; they
 were so far from discouraging any
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Christians, in their reading the Holy Scriptures, that they commend those who read even the hardest Books among them. Those words are very remarkable, *I. Revel. 3. Blessed is he that readeth, and they that hear the words of this Prophecy; and keep those things that are written therein.*

Which comfortable encouragement I do not see why we may not, with the greatest satisfaction, apply to ourselves now, as they did then, to quicken us to read and hear the things contained therein. For though we do not certainly understand every one of those Prophecies; yet there are abundance of most excellent instructions and admonitions, encouragements and consolations interspersed throughout that Book; which make it fit to be read by Christian people for their direction and support. And we may likewise from hence take the confidence to argue in this manner: If a Blessedness be pronounced to those that *read or hear that Prophecy, and keep those things that are written therein;* then they cannot be accursed, who for the same end read other holy Books,

where such instructions and comforts are more plentifully, and plainly, and on purpose delivered : nor can they expect God's blessing who prohibit the reading even of those easie and more familiar Scriptures, which are accommodated by the Divine Wisdom and Goodness to the most vulgar capacity.

Every one ought to drink of these *Fountains* : nor would I forbid (saith *Erasmus* very piously) those that thirst after Christian knowledge, to read even those Books, which are not so open, but like a *Fountain sealed up*. Because they will reap this fruit at least, that they will come more fit to the hearing of Sermons, which touch upon, or allude to those more obscure passages. They will hear also those things more willingly, of which they have already some knowledge : and understand those things more easily, of which they have a small taste.

VI.

AND there is the greater reason for it, because the Holy Scriptures are
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a considerable part of our compleat Spiritual Armour; without which we shall lie so open to the assaults of our Enemies, that it will very much hazard our Salvation. And why should we be exposed to any danger, when we may defend our selves by the use of those weapons which God himself hath provided for us? Or how can they be Friends to our Souls, who would expose us by taking those weapons out of our hands?

Read the VI. *Ephes.* 11. &c. Where the Apostle exhorting them to put on the whole Armour (or compleat Armour) of God, that they might be able to stand against all the wiles of the Devil; in the following Verses enumerates the several parts of this Armour; and the last piece of it, but one, is (v. 17) *the Sword of the Spirit, which is the Word of God.* This shews that, as while we have Enemies to fight withal, and very powerful, subtil Enemies, we have need of all sorts of Weapons that God hath furnished us withal for our defence; so we are not completely appointed for our defence, without
this

this weapon, *the Word of God*, no more than a Souldier is without his Sword. And therefore they who go about to deprive us of this, leave us, in great part, naked to our Spiritual Enemies: By wresting that weapon out of our hands, whereby we should beat them off.

There is not one of the Devils temptations, ye may observe, (IV. St. *Matth.*) but our Saviour vanquished it by this weapon: telling him, it is so and so written; and the Tempter had no more to say, nor knew what to oppose thereunto. And therefore our safety lies in the same Divine Armory of the Holy Scriptures: unto which we ought to have resort upon all occasions; and there furnish our selves with such holy Precepts, Examples, Promises, and Threatnings, as we may have ready at hand to oppose to every temptation.

It is usually said, as I noted in the beginning, that men may wound themselves with a Sword, as soon as their Enemies: and therefore it is not safe to let every body take this weapon into his hand.

But

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But was not the Apostle as much aware of this as we? Were not the Holy Scriptures as liable to be perverted then, as now? And we by this reason shall leave neither Sun in Heaven, nor any good Creature here upon Earth (as a great Man of our own somewhere speaks) for they have been all wretchedly abused to very ill purposes by evil men.

And besides this, it is not true that men may as soon hurt themselves, as their Enemies, with this Sword. For who but mad men, or desperate persons, run that weapon into their own bodies, wherewith they should defend their lives? And who but they that are distracted themselves, will suppose the generality of Christians to be such a frantick sort of people, that they are not to be trusted with the means of their preservation: but must have even the bread of life taken from them, for fear they surfeit of it?

But this will be more fully answered hereafter: and that which I have next to represent to your consideration, will give great satisfaction to it, which is this,

VII.

THAT the greatest Doctors in the Church have most earnestly exhorted the people, with all the Rhetorick they could invent, to give themselves leisure for this holy imployment, of reading the Holy Scriptures.

S. Chrysostome, for instance, in a number of places, maintains these three Propositions, with an extraordinary zeal, and passionate concern, to have them believed and practised.

First, That all men, of whatsoever rank and condition they be, ought to read the Bible; not only at Church, but at home.

Secondly, That it is more necessary for a mere Lay-man, as we speak, to read it, than it is for a Monk, or those that are wholly sequestred from the World.

Thirdly, That neither the obscurity of the Scriptures, nor indeed any thing else, ought to be thought a sufficient reason why men should not read them.

I. For the first of these, [*That all men,*

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men, of whatsoever rank and condition they be, should read the Scriptures] his words are very remarkable upon that place of St. Paul, III. Coloss. 16. *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another, &c.* where he cries out with great vehemence, *Ακούσατε ὅσοι ἐσὶ κοσμητικοί, &c.* Hearken to this as many of you as are men of the world, and have wives and children under your care; how he commands, even you especially, to read the Scriptures: and that not simply, nor by the bye, but with a great deal of diligence. Which he presses, by comparing the heavenly Treasure here contained with all other riches; and then returns to his Exhortation again, saying, *Ακούσατε, παρακαλῶ, πάντες οἱ βιωτικοί, &c.* Hearken, I beseech you, all ye that are Secular men: provide your selves with Bibles, the Medicines of your Souls. If not with the whole, yet at least the New Testament; the Apostles, the Acts, the Gospels, your perpetual Instructors. If any sadness befall thee, look into these as into a Repository or Shop of spiritual Remedies. Hence fetch consolation in all doleful cases; whether it be
any

any damage in thy goods, or it be death, or the loss of servants. Or rather do not look into them; but take them all to thy self; carry them about with thee in thy mind. This is the cause of all evils, not to know the Scriptures. We go to War without our Armour, without Weapons; how can we be safe? It is easie to overcome with these; but not without them. Do not throw all upon our shoulders. Ye are Sheep; but not irrational ones, but reasonable: and many things the Apostle lays upon you. Who ought to learn of us: and then your wives and your children ought to learn of you. But you would leave all to us: which gives us no small trouble.

To the same purpose he discourges in other places of his works; and maintains it by such arguments as these.

First, that every man hath need of such instruments as belong to his art. A *Black-smith* (saith he in his third Sermon upon *Lazarus*) or *Gold-smith* cannot work without their *Anvil*, their *Hammer* and their *Tongs*, and such like *Tools*: which they will by no means part withall, though they suffer hunger and thirst; because then they give up
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their trade, and all means of their subsistence is gone : and even just so ought we to be disposed ; who can no more go to work, without the Apostolical and Prophetical Writings , and other divinely inspired Scriptures, than they without those Tools. For as by those Instruments they form and fashion all the Vessels they take in hand : So we by these, hammer, as I may say, our own Souls, amending and reforming all that is amiss, renewing what is decayed, nay, making our selves quite other Men. For here is the difference between us and them : They shew their art only in the outward figure of a thing (for they cannot alter the matter of it ; by turning Silver, for instance into Gold) but we, by these Divine Instruments, may do a great deal more ; turn an Earthen Vessel, into a Golden ; a Vessel unto Honour, as the Apostle speaks, sanctified and meet for the Masters use, and prepared unto every good Work. Let us not neglect therefore the getting of Bibles : Nor let us dig for Gold, but rather treasure up these Spiritual Books. For the more Gold we have, the more hurt it may do us : But Bibles if we get, they will do those that have them a great deal of good.

Second-

Secondly, He presseth this, by this further consideration, that as S^t Paul would have us, *let the Word of Christ dwell in us richly and abundantly*: so S^t Peter requires us to be ready always to give an answer to every man, that asketh us a reason of the hope that is in us. 1. PET. III. 15. Now what say our idle People, more lazy than Drones, to this? They comfort themselves with those words in the Proverbs, *Blessed is the simple Soul.* For this is the cause of all our evils, that many do not understand how to produce the Testimonies of the Scriptures to the purpose. For the Wise Man by the Simple doth not there mean, an ignorant man, that understand nothing; but a harmless man, that works no evil, but hath skill only to do good. Thus he discourses in his XVII Homily upon S^t John's Gospel: Where he shews it is an unpardonable neglect, not to be able out of the Holy Scriptures, to repel the assaults of Gentile Philosophers. For it is a most absurd thing, that every Physician should be able to give an exact account of his art; nay a Carrier or Weaver, or any other Artist can do the same; only he that is cal-

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ed a Christian, cannot give an account of his own Faith.

Thirdly, As every man is bound to give a reason of his Faith; so he is bound to take care of his Souls proficiency in Vertue and Goodness: Which he cannot do, unless he be conversant in the Holy Writings. For what sensible Food is to the increase of bodily strength, that the reading of the Scriptures is to the Soul. It is a Spiritual Nourishment; and renders the Soul stronger, more constant, and more philosophical: not suffering it to be carried away with absurd imaginations; but making it pure and lightsome, gives it wings to carry it up to Heaven.

Much more to the same purpose he speaks in his XXIX Homily upon Genesis: and begins the XXXV. in this manner. Great is the good, my Beloved, of skill in the Divine Writings. For this makes a Philosophical Soul (that is, instructs it in all manner of Vertue) this forms a man to be acceptable: this makes him mind none of these things present, but to have his mind alwayes in the other Life: that looking at the recompence our Lord will give us, we may do

do all that He would have us, and undertake the labours of Vertue with great chearfulness. For from thence we may exactly learn the Providence of God's speedy succour and help; the Fortitude of the Righteous; the Goodness of our Lord; the Greatness of his Rewards. From thence we may be excited to a zealous imitation of the Christian Vertue of brave men: that we may not flag in the Combates of Vertue; but be confident and assured in the Divine Promises, before they come to pass. Therefore let us, I beseech you, with great diligence apply our selves to the reading of holy Writings: for thereby we shall be furnished with Divine knowledge, if we frequently make them our study: it being impossible that he should be neglected by God, who with earnest diligence and fervent desire, imployes himself in these Divine things; but, if no man can be found to teach us, the Lord himself will come from above into our hearts, and inlighten our minds, and shine into our understandings, and reveal those things that are hidden, and instruct us in those things wherein we are ignorant; provided we will contribute all that lies in us to the business.

Fourth-

Fourthly, This he illustrates by the Example of the *Eunuch*, in the VIII. of the *Acts*: whom he magnifies in several places of his Works (as I shall have occasion to observe) upon several accounts, belonging to this matter: particularly here, for not neglecting to read the Prophet *Isaiah*; though he himself was a Barbarian, and ignorant what the Prophet said: but because he did what he could, and with all the diligence he was able, he obtained a Guide from God. Consider here, I beseech you, how beneficial it was to this man, that he did not omit reading; no, though he was in a journey, on the highway. Let those hearken to this, who will not do so much at home: but look upon this as a by-business, because they cohabit with a wife, or are listed Souldiers, and have the care of children, and must look after their servants, and have a great deal of business in the World; which they imagine sufficiently excuses them from troubling themselves with reading the Holy Scriptures. For see here all this confuted in this Barbarian, a man of business, and in his journey, &c. who was so studious and intent upon his read-

reading, that nothing could divert him from it; as he proceeds to show in that *Homily* with a great deal of Eloquence; which will be more pertinently alledged under some of the other general Heads. I only observe one thing more under this.

Fifthly, That he urges this obligation they had upon them to read the Holy Scriptures, from this Argument, That otherwise they would not be able to instruct their Children and Families: as he tells them they were bound to do, from the forenamed Precept of St. Paul, *Let the word of Christ dwell in you richly, in all wisdom, teaching and admonishing one another in Psalms, &c.* Observe, saith he, how the Apostle declines all that might deter them from this business. Because there is great pains to be taken in the reading some Scriptures, and it is a laborious business to understand them; therefore he commends the Psalms: that he might at once delight their minds, and make the labour easie to them. Now your Children are acquainted with Satanical Songs and Dances; like to those who keep Viſtualling-houses, and Dancing-masters: but none
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of them knows so much as one Psalm. Hence all our mischiefs : for like to the Soil in which the Plant is set, will be the fruit. Teach thy Children therefore to chant the Psalms ; those that are full of Philosophy. For Example, those straight-way that teach temperance : or rather before all, those about avoiding ill company, with which the Book begins. For upon this score the Prophet enters upon his work with this admonition : Blessed is the man that walketh not in the way of the ungodly, &c. and again, (26. 4.) I have not sat with vain persons : and again (XV 4) in whose eyes a vile person is contemned, but he honoureth them that fear the Lord. Like to these thou wilt find many more, concerning bridling the appetite of meat and drink, and all the pleasures of the belly ; concerning keeping the hands from theft ; against covetousness ; and that riches are nothing, nor glory neither, nor all the rest of like nature. If from a Child thou accustom him to these Notions, by little and little thou wilt advance him to sublimer apprehensions. For then he will understand the Hymns, which have nothing humane in them, but are things more Divine.

vine. For the heavenly Powers sing Hymns, not Psalms, &c.

By which repeated Exhortations, it appears, these were not hasty thoughts, which on a sudden sprung up in him, when he was in the heat of his discourse: but the deliberate, constant and settled sense of his mind; which was highly concerned to bring all the people, committed unto his charge, to a more familiar acquaintance with the Holy Scriptures.

This will still more fully appear in the *Second Proposition* which he maintains: and that is such, as may perfectly put to shame the Doctrine of the present *Roman Church*. For it is this,

II. *That it is more necessary for a Lay-man to read the Scriptures, than for a Monk, or those that are sequestered from the World.* To this purpose he discourses in his second Sermon upon *St. Matthew*: *This is the plague that now infests us, and corrupts all; that you imagine the reading of the Scriptures belongs to Monks only, and not to you that have wives and children, and worldly business: whereas it is more necessary*
for

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for you, than for them. For they that live in the World, being most exposed to the danger of being wounded, have most need of medicines; to preserve them, that is, or to cure them.

Thus likewise in the third Sermon upon *Lazarus* before mentioned, he discourseth to this effect: Let no man tell me, I am engaged in pleading Causes, the publick business lies upon me, I have a Trade, I must live by my handy work, I have a wife and family; in short, I am a man of the World, and it is not for me to read the Scriptures: but for those who have bid an adieu to it. What dost thou say, man; is it not thy business to turn over the Scriptures, because thou art distracted with worldly cares? For that very reason it is more thy business, than theirs. For they have less need of the defence of the Scriptures, than we have: who are tossed in the midst of the waves of business. They are, as it were, in the Haven; they are secure, and enjoy perfect tranquillity: it is we who fluctuate in the midst of the Sea; who are obnoxious, whether we will or no, to innumerable sins; and therefore have perpetual need of the comfort and the assistance of the Holy Scriptures. C What

What can more effectually represent the sense of the ancient Doctors, than this? unless it be what follows, out of the XXI. *Homily upon Genesis*; upon those words, *Noah begat three Sons. Let us not bring forth those frigid words, I am a worldly man, I have a wife, the care of children lies upon me: as the manner of many is to excuse themselves, when we bid them labour to be good, and apply their study to read the Holy Scriptures. That doth not belong to me, say they; have I renounced the World? am I a Monk? What dost thou say, man? Doth this belong to Monks only to study in all things to please God, who would have all men to be saved, and to come to the knowledge of the Truth?*

Let us not deceive our selves; but the more we are intangled in such kind of cares, let us so much the more carefully search for a remedy, in the reading of the Holy Scriptures. Was not Noah and such like good men, of the same Nature, of which we are? and yet had not the benefit of those helps and assistances that we enjoy. How can we then be excused, who enjoy such a Doctrine, who have obtained such Grace, who have
helps

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helps from above, and have received the promises of ineffable good things; if we do not come to the measure of that Vertue, at which those Patriarchs arrived? I beseech you therefore again, that you would not only simply look into those things which are contained in the Holy Scriptures; but that you would read them with attention: that by the profit we receive from them, we may at last, though we have been a long time about it, come to that degree of Vertue which God will approve.

The same he urges again, in the XXXV. Homily upon the same Book, from the Example of the Eunuch reading the Scriptures in his Chariot: which he thus concludes. *I have laid this History before you, that we may not be ashamed to imitate this Eunuch; nor neglect reading, no not in a journey. For this Barbarian alone may suffice for a Master to us all: both to those that lead a private Country-life, and to those who are listd to serve in the Army, and to those that live in the Court; and in general, to all men, and to women too, and to those that live in Monasteries also, that no time should be thought unfit to the*

reading of the Holy Oracles. For it is possible, not only within doors, but to those who go to Market, that are in Journeys, that fall into a great deal of Company, that are intangled in business, to be conversant in them: that doing what we can, we may meet with one to guide us. And what if we do not understand what we read? let us go it over again. For frequent meditation imprints things on the memory, and oft-times what we could not understand to day, we may find out presently when we read it again to morrow: the most gracious God invisibly illuminating our understanding.

Which leads me to the last Proposition; which he maintains, in Answer to all Objections that can be made against this Doctrine.

III. That, *as none ought to neglect reading, because they are men of business so, they ought not to excuse themselves, because they want Bibles; or because the Scriptures are so obscure, that they do not understand them.*

Concerning business, you have heard already what he was wont to say.

And

And concerning want of Bibles ; he tells them, the rich cannot pretend this. And as for the poor, I would ask them, saith he, *this Question, Whether they have not all the tools belonging to their Trade. And since they can furnish themselves with such necessary implements, why they should not judge it most absurd to be wholly unprovided of the Holy Scriptures : which are as necessary for their spiritual, as the other for their bodily subsistence.*

But to the greatest Objection of all, *the obscurity of the Holy Scriptures*, and that it is impossible to understand them, he answers very largely in several places of his Works : particularly in that *Homily* forenamed upon *Genesis XXXV.* speaking of the Eunuch of the Queen of *Ethiopia.* Who did not say, as many do now, I understand nothing of what I read ; I cannot dive into the depth of these Scriptures ; to what purpose should I take all this pains, and tire my self in vain, by reading : when I have none to lead me into the meaning ? No such thought was entertained by him, who was a Barbarian in his language, but a Philosopher in his mind : and rather con-

cluded he should not be despised, but receive help from above, if, doing all that lay in his power, he continued reading the Holy Scriptures. And therefore the most Gracious Lord of all, seeing his ardent desire, did not overlook him, nor left him unprovided: but straightway sent him a Master to inform him.

See here the Wisdom of God, how He expected till he first did what he could; and then He manifested his own powerful aid. Because he prepared himself, the best he was able, an Angel of the Lord was sent to Philip, that he might do the rest, &c.

But this Argument he prosecutes most largely, in his *Third Sermon* upon *Lazarus*. Where, first of all he says, a man cannot look into the Holy Scriptures, but he must be made better: God conversing with him there in those Writings: so that though he do not understand what he reads, yet his mind will be much purified by reading: by a holy sense of God, he means, upon whom his mind is fixed, as speaking to him.

But immediately he further adds, that what is objected, is not true of all Scriptures: some being so plain,
that

that it is impossible to be without understanding of all things whatsoever, that we read there. For the Grace of the Holy Spirit, on purpose ordered these Books to be composed by Publicans, by Fishermen, by Tent-makers, by Shepherds, and such like mean and unlearned men, that none of the common people might flee to this Pretence; but the things that are there written, might be intelligible to all. That the Handicrafts-men, and the Servants, and the poor old Women, and the most illiterate of all mankind, might be gainers, and profit by the hearing of them.

And what they designed they effected; For to whom are not all things in the Gospel manifest and clear? Who is there that reads these words, Blessed are the meek, blessed are the merciful, blessed are the pure in heart, and the like, that needs any other Teacher to instruct him, what it is that is said? And are not all things that relate to signs and wonders, and the History of Christ, clear and easie to be understood of all? These objections are but a cover and pretext under which men hide their sloth and idleness.

Which further appears from the

temper of those men, that from the beginning were counted worthy of the Grace of the Spirit: who composed all things, not as they without the Pale of the Church, for Ostentation, and their own Vain-glories sake, but for the Salvation of those that heard them.

The Heathen Philosophers indeed, and Orators, and other Writers, not seeking the common good of all, but aiming at the making themselves admired, when they said any profitable thing, made it difficult to be understood, and wrapt it up in some obscurity: But the Apostles and Prophets did all quite contrary, making all plain and clear, as the common Teachers of the whole World; that every one might be able, of himself, to learn, by the bare reading only, such necessary things as those now mentioned. Which the Prophet foreshewed when he said, they shall all be taught of God. And every man shall not say to his Neighbour know the Lord; for they shall all know me from the least to the greatest. And so St. Paul, I came not to you in the excellency of Speech, or of Wisdom, showing you the Mysteries of God. And again, my Speech and my Preaching was not in
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the enticing words of man's Wisdom: but in the demonstration of the Spirit and of Power. And again, we speak Wisdom among them that are perfect; yet not the Wisdom of this World, nor of the Princes of this World, that come to nought, &c.

And lastly, he proves this from the intention for which they wrote these Books: which was that all might find a remedy here of whatsoever troubled them. This he admirably prosecutes in these words, because thou art engaged in Family-affairs and a world of business, therefore thou hast the greater need of more Medicines. For not only thy Wife provokes thee, but thy Child makes thee sad, and thy Servant angers thee, and thy Enemy deviseth mischief against thee, and thy Friend envies thee, and thy Neighbour does thee damage, and thy Fellow-souldier supplants thee: Nay perhaps, He that sits in judgment threatens thee, and Poverty makes thee sorrowful, and the Running away of thy Servants fetches tears from thy Eyes: in short, either Prosperity puffs thee up; or Adversity pinches thee sore, and makes thee shrink. There are many occasions

of Anger, many of Thoughtfulness, many of Sadness and Sorrow; and many also of Vain-glory and senseless Pride: Straits and Difficulties encompass us on every side, and a thousand Darts from all sides come flying at us. And therefore we have perpetual need of that Panoply (complete Armour) which is to be fetcht out of the Scriptures.

A great deal more there follows, which I shall not transcribe, to shew what a necessity there is of these Divine Remedies to heal the wounds we receive; or rather to keep off the blow that gives them, and to beat back the fiery Darts of the Devil, by a frequent reading of the Holy Scriptures: and concludes thus, ἡ γὰρ ἐστὶν ἡ ἐσιτι-
ναὶ σωθῆναι, &c. For it cannot be, it is impossible that any man should be saved, that enjoys not continually the Benefit of Spiritual Reading.

But after he hath thus answered the Objection about the obscurity of the Scriptures, by denying it to be altogether true: He proceeds further to shew, that granting it to be true, they are not therefore to be laid aside, and not to be read by us.

First,

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First, Because by often reading, that which is obscure may become plain. So he discourses in the often named Sermon upon *Lazarus*. Dost thou not understand what is in these Books? No, how shouldst thou understand when thou wilt not so much as look into them? Take the Bible into thy hand read the whole History; and retaining what is plain and intelligible, read what is obscure and uncertain, over and over again.

Secondly, Suppose thou canst not with frequent reading find out the sense: then go to one that is wiser than thy self: come to the Teacher and Instructor, as a Scholar to his Master: Communicate with him concerning the things that are spoken: Demonstrate a great diligence and desire to learn: and if God see this forwardness and readiness of mind in thee, He will not overlook thy watchfulness, and solicitous care; but if no man can be found to teach thee, He will reveal his mind Himself to thee.

This he explains by the example often already named, saying, Remember the Eunuch of the Queen of Ethiopia, who being a Barbarian and engaged in a thousand cares, and surrounded
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with abundance of business, and did not understand what he read, yet notwithstanding continued reading as he sate in his Chariot. If he shewed such diligence upon the High-way, consider what kind of man he was at home. If he would not suffer the time of his travel to pass away without reading, how much more diligent, may we well think, he was when he sate in his House? If when he understood not what he read, he would not omit reading; how much more did he use it, after he had learnt something? For that he did not understand what he read, his answer to Philip shews, when he ask'd him, Understandest thou what thou readest? He did not blush, nor was ashamed to confess his Ignorance; but said, how can I, unless I had some body to guide me? Because therefore he thus imployed his time in reading, when he had none to guide him; therefore straightway one was sent to conduct and lead him. God saw his forwardness and accepted his diligence, and presently sent him a Teacher.

But Philip is not here present with me; to instruct me, when I read. True; but the Spirit which moved Philip is present. Let us not, my beloved, despise

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our own Salvation. All these things were written for our Instruction ; upon whom the ends of the world are come.

The reading of the Scripture is a great security against Sin : and ignorance of them is a great precipice , a deep pit , or rather bottomless gulph : A manifest betraying of Salvation , to know Nothing out of the Divine Laws. This hath both brought forth Heresies ; and led to corruption of Manners. This hath turned all things topsy-turvy. For it is impossible, utterly impossible , for any man to go away from reading the Holy Scriptures, without some fruit ; if he read them with care.

I should tire my Reader, if I should set down all that this Great and Holy man hath said upon this subject. Which he presses, you see, with such vehemence ; as if he thought it impossible for his people to be saved, unless they read the Holy Scriptures. So contrary was the Doctrine then, to what is now current in the *Roman Church* : who teach , that people will rather indanger their Salvation, by the reading of them.

And one thing I cannot pass by with-

without a particular Remark, before I have done with this. That he gives that very reason (in the words just now quoted) why the people should read the Scriptures, which the *Romanists* give why they should not read them, viz. *the danger of running into Errours and Heresies.* Therefore, say they, the people ought not to read the Scriptures: no such matter, saith he, but quite contrary, they will run into them, if they do not read them.

From hence spring up myriads of evils, even from Ignorance of the Scriptures: from hence pernicious Heresies, negligent Life, and corruption of Manners. For as they who are destitute of light, cannot make straight paths: so such as do not take along with them the light of God's Word, in many things necessarily offend and stumble, as walking in utter darkness.

They are his words in his XXXII. Sermon upon St. John. And in his VIII. Sermon upon the *Hebrews*, he makes a sad complaint about the growth of one particular Heresie; that of the *Manichees*: and tells his people, it was because they neglected the

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the Scripture. *For if we attended to them, we should not only preserve our selves from the deceit, but deliver others also that are deceived, and draw them out of the danger.*

But it is time to make an end of this, and therefore I shall only add these few memorable words of his, out of his second Sermon upon *St. Matthew* (that you may see how faithfully they follow the Fathers, who pretend to be wholly guided by them) *If there be a greater sin than that of not reading the Scriptures, it is this; to be perswaded that we need not read them, ταῦτα γὰρ σατανικῆς μελέτης τὰ ῥήματα* for these are words of a Satanical suggestion; the studied invention of the Devil.

I have been the longer upon this Head, because some are more moved by a great Authority, than by bare Reason. And I have alledged this Father's Authority alone, not for want of other (which are ready at hand in great abundance) but because it is deservedly very weighty; and as he is full and express in his Judgment about this matter, so he intermixes his Discourse

courſe upon it, with many excellent Inſtructions.

But if we had neither his Teſtimony, nor any other to produce, there is one piece of Hiſtory remaining, which is ſufficient to ſatisſie any man in this matter. Which is, that it was the very Mark and Character of a *Chriſtian*, to have a *Bible*; and of an *Apoſtate*, to deliver his Bible to be burnt; when the Inquiſitors came to ſearch for it in times of Perſecution.

As they did particularly in the Reign of *Maxentius* and of *Diocleſian*: when they ſought to deſtroy all *Bibles*, as the Foundation of Chriſtian Religion; which they thought would fall, when theſe Books were gone. And that *Lay-men* generally had Bibles, as well as *Prieſts*, and were guilty of this foul Crime of delivering them up to the Perſecutors, appears by *Optatus* in his firſt Book againſt *Parmenio*.

Quid commemorem Laicos, &c. 'What need I ſtand to mention the *Lay-people*, who then had no Dignities in the Church, or many *Minifters* (he means 'inferiour Officers) or *Deacons* in the 'third Order, or *Presbyters* in the ſecond

‘cond Priesthood, when the very Supreme, some Bishops in those times, ‘*impiously delivered up the Instruments of the Divine Law.*

He names several, and among the rest *Donatus*. And the same we find in *St. Austin*, *Epist. XLVIII.* and *CLXXI.* and other places: Where he relates ‘how some delivered up the ‘Holy Books to the Persecutors; and ‘others who did not, communicated ‘with them that did: mixing with ‘the Church *TRADITORUM plebem congregatam*, a whole Congregation ‘of people that were *Traditors*.

Which shows, that Bibles were then as common as they are now: and that *S. Chrysostom*’s complaints were very just against those, who were grown so cold and negligent in providing themselves these Holy Books, as if they still had been under Persecution, and it were not safe to have them, now that they lived under Christian Emperours.

VIII.

BUT now let us hear what common Reason faith (as well as the Scripture, and the best Interpreters of them, such great Lights as he now named) and that teaches us, that since the Holy Scriptures were written for the use and benefit of all, all should have liberty to read them.

They were written for all, it is plain; for that which they teach is the duty of all; that which they promise is the portion of all. And if any one say, it doth not therefore follow they should be read by all, because the people may be taught by others, without looking into the Scriptures themselves; they render themselves suspected that they intend not to teach the people sincerely what is written; but to establish their own Authority, instead of that of the Divine Writings. For otherwise, why should they not rather, when they pretend to teach others, bid them look into their Bibles, and there satisfy themselves, that they do not abuse them: assuring
them

them it is a faithful Translation of God's Book, which they have in their hands ; whose meaning it is their business to help them to understand ?

That is , why do they not imitate God himself ? Who commanding his Prophet to proclaim him to be the only God among the *Babylonians*, and that the Gods which made not the Heavens and the Earth, should perish from the Earth, and from under these Heavens, ordered him to do it in their own Language, that they might read and understand it, X. *Jer.* 11. Where, when all the rest of the Book is *Hebrew*, this Message is delivered in the *Chaldee* Tongue. Which we may justly look upon, as a *Preludium* to the publishing of the Name of God among the Gentiles in their own Language, in the days of Christ. When, as *Theodoret* witnesseth, the words of the Apostles and Prophets, were turned into the Language of the *Romans*, *Egyptians*, *Persians*, *Indians*, *Armenians*, *Scythians*, and *Sauromatans*, and all the Languages that any other Nation used. And therefore why should not we now have them in *English* ? And
having

having them, why should not all read, that they may learn the way to be happy here and eternally; and that they may be sure they are not led into a wrong way: and abused by pretended Authority from God, who, perhaps, saith the quite contrary to what is delivered in his Name?

This is the Peoples Right; and it is their Duty to use it, as that Great Man *S. Chrysostom* (whose words let me set down once more) teaches his Church, upon *2 Corinth. VII.* in the conclusion of his *XIII. Sermon.* *For how can we think it not to be absurd, that having to deal in money-matters, men will not trust to others; but the Counters are brought out, and they cast up the Summ: but in the business of their Souls, are barely led, and drawn aside by the Opinions of other men? And this, even when they have an exact Scale (wherein to weigh all things) an exact Rule, or Square (whereby to measure them) the dictate of the Divine Laws. Therefore I beseech and intreat you all, that not minding what such or such a man saith about these things; you would consult the Holy Scriptures concerning them all, &c.* And

And if you consider what kind of Auditors Christ had, you may soon come to a conclusion in this matter; and learn from thence what his intention is.

Were they not the promiscuous multitude? People of all sorts, and conditions? And will He take it ill to be read of those, by whom He would be heard?

Some will say, there is danger in reading; the words may be mistaken, or perverted: And may they not be so in hearing? Can any Preacher, in the *Roman Church*, so frame his discourse, that he can warrant not a word he saith shall be misunderstood, or misinterpreted, and turned to another sense than he meant it?

By this reason the poor people shall be taught nothing at all; if we must do them no good, because some may possibly abuse it, and turn it to their hurt.

Nay, if God himself may not be heard by the people, speaking to them in the vulgar Tongue; I see far less reason why men should: who can say nothing but what may be wrested and misconstrued.

Further

Further yet ; the wisest and most learned may pervert and wrest the Scriptures ; and therefore if this be a reason , why they should not be read, they must be wholly laid aside , and none permitted to read them.

The Scribes and Pharisees , I am sure , did so ; far more than the most simple people : And yet none will say, they ought not to have read the Scriptures , it being the profession of the Scribes.

None more obstinately resisted Christ, than they who had these Holy Books perpetually in their hands ; in which He was promised and foreshadowed. They were his most bitter Enemies , who were the allowed Expounders of the Law and the Prophets : making use of all they read to oppose Him. And therefore either none, no not the most learned, no more than the simple, must read the Scriptures ; for fear of doing themselves and others harm by them : or this is not a good Reason against the common peoples reading them ; nor is it the reading them that doth hurt , but the reading them with a bad mind and with naughty affections. The

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The Learned may abuse them, as well as the Unlearned, if they be ill disposed: and the Unlearned may get good by them, as well as the Learned, if they be well affected.

There are some things clearer, than that any can doubt of them, or stand in need of an Interpreter; the simplest may easily apprehend them, and be instructed by them, if they come with honest and good hearts to learn their Duty: and yet the wisest will not apprehend them, or not receive them, though never so plain, if their hearts be otherwise bent, and ill disposed in their affections. They that have devoted themselves to this World, will be offended with them: even because they are so plain, and directly cross their intentions and designs.

For what were the things, that made our Saviour so troublesom to the Scribes and Pharisees? His Life was perfectly innocent; his Conversation free and friendly with all sorts of people; his Heart was open to give them an easie access into his presence and into his affections; his Power was beneficial; his Doctrine was most heavenly;

venly ; his Precepts just and good ; his Promises exceeding great and precious above all earthly Treasure. The business therefore was, they were possessed of a Kingdom ; in which they were honoured as the most Learned, adored as Saints, enriched with great Treasures, esteemed worthy of greater : this they thought the happiest condition, this state of things they wisht might always be continued : but feared our Saviour would draw the hearts of the people from them, and that their Authority would be diminished by admitting his : and therefore they set themselves against him, and could not endure the light of his Gospel ; which showed them how little they must be content to be in this World, and only promised to make them great men in the Kingdom of Heaven ; whereof they made no account.

And it is to be feared, that for the very same reason some men in the Christian World are against the reading of the Holy Scriptures, for which they were against the receiving of Jesus Christ Himself. Their Authority, they

they fear, will thereby be impaired: They shall not be able to lead the people, whither they please, with an implicate Belief: their eyes will be opened, and seeing how they have been abused, they will grow less credulous; and not so easily entertain those Doctrines, which are very gainful to the Teachers, when they see they are altogether unprofitable to them that receive them.

I am sure such evil affections will never let men understand the Scriptures aright: but incline the wisest and most discerning men (if so ill disposed) to bend them, sooner than any meaner persons, to their own crooked interests.

Thus I have finished the first part of this Work; when I have made a few Reflections upon what hath been discoursed.

I. And *First* of all this demonstrates how unreasonable, unjust, and uncharitable (to say no worse) the Decrees of the present *Roman* Church are: which deny to Christian people that liberty, which God and his Church

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have always allowed them. This prohibition to read the Scriptures in the vulgar Tongue, is a manifest *Innovation*. There is an evident Change in the Church of *Rome* it self, since St. *Hierom's* days, who bestowed several Epistles upon divers Women, to press them to read them, and to teach them to their little Children. Which made *Esperenceus*, a Romish Bishop, honestly say, that he could not but wonder, how that should now be counted so pestilent and capital, which the *Ancients* frequently commend as most wholesom.

II. *Secondly*, This Discourse should serve for a Caution to us, not to Intrust our Souls with such Guides, as err thus palpably, and I doubt wilfully, in so plain a business as this. For how easily will they mistake, or mislead their Followers, in other cases? especially where there may be some difficulty, or some seeming Authority for it?

III. *Thirdly*, And this should incline every one of us, to adhere most firmly and faithfully to this Church.
Which

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Which is so *sincerely honest*, that it fears not to be tryed by this Touchstone, the Holy Scripture: so *well constituted*, that Christians cannot, in reason, desire more free and plentiful means of their instruction, than they have, in all things necessary to their Salvation.

Lastly, Which therefore let us take care we do not abuse: and thereby help to confirm and harden the Church of Rome in their Errours.

We ought not, I have demonstrated, to lay aside the Holy Scriptures out of our hands (God forbid we should consent to that) but they themselves require us, *to lay aside all filthiness, and superfluity of naughtiness, that* (coming thus with prepared minds) *with meekness we may receive the ingrafted word, which is able to save our Souls,* Jam. I. 21.

That's the *End* for which we must read these Holy Books (as laying aside all naughty affections is the *Method*) to know what we must do to be saved. Not to learn how to discourse, to dispute, and argue, much less to cavil;

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but how to live according to the Will of God in our several places : which is the way to everlasting Salvation.

And whatsoever belongs either to a godly life, or the necessary Articles of Christian Faith, is so plainly delivered there, that when we meet with any thing that is doubtful, or hard to be understood, we are told plainly enough what to do in that case. They themselves direct us, not to *be wise in our own conceits*, not to *lean to our own understanding* ; but to go and advise with those whom God hath appointed to expound them to us. Who will either satisfy us what is the meaning of such places ; or that it is not of such moment, that we need to trouble our selves about it.

For these Books are so far from giving us the least encouragement to be bold and presumptuous, to slight our Instructors, and much less, to despise our Governours, whether Civil or Spiritual ; that there is Nothing they teach us more plainly, than to be humble and modest ; and that as we ought to *fear God*, so likewise to *honour the King* and his Ministers ; and to obey
those

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those that watch over our Souls ; nay, to esteem them very highly in love for their work sake. Which will dispose us most certainly (if we be not carried away with pride, or any other vicious affection) to be ruled by them in dubious things : and, as it there follows in the Apostle, (*1 Theff. V. 13.*) *to be at peace among our selves.* I must beseech therefore every Member of this Church, both for the honour of our Religion, and for the safety of their own Souls, to be as careful in this matter, as I would have them to be in reading the Holy Scriptures.

Take your Guides along with you ; do not think your selves safe, without their conduct ; be not only willing, but desirous to learn of them ; reverence their Instructions ; do not easily dissent from them ; be afraid to oppose them : especially when you have reason to think them to be serious, studious, knowing, and conscientious men ; who take care to inform themselves aright, that they may not misinform you.

For such men look upon themselves to be bound (as hath been shown in

the Treatise of Tradition, pag. 24.) to guide themselves in their Direction of others, by *what the Catholick Fathers and ancient Bishops have taught out of the Doctrine of the Old and New Testament*; and thereby preserve their Flocks in the Truth of God's holy Word. And having a great regard also to the sense of that Church wherein they live, which by their Subscriptions they owne to have *Authority in Controversies of Faith*, they will no less preserve them in Unity and in Peace.

To conclude; it is impossible but every body must reap great fruit by the reading of the Scriptures, if they read them for no other end; but that they may go away better from the reading of them, than they came to it: and that they may not accommodate them to their own affections; but correct all their affections, and desires, and the whole course of their life, by this exact Rule of Righteousness. According to which, if we square our selves, we shall presently learn; *in difficult things to be wise unto sobriety, and in plain things to be wise unto Salvation*: that is, so wise as to do what

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we certainly know to be our Duty; which is the only Wisdom that the Scriptures magnifie. Which will be the surest way, *both to know more, and to know it better*: that is, to feel the comfort of what we know, in a blessed and assured hope of everlasting life; which God, who cannot lye, hath promised to us, in Christ Jesus our Lord.

The End of the First Part.

PART II.

HAVING shewn in the foregoing Discourse, that those words of *S^t Peter* (2. *III.* 16.) which are wont to be alledged against the reading of Holy Scriptures, do plainly suppose that the people did then read them: I proceed now in the next place to shew that the Apostle doth not deter men from reading them, by representing the difficulties that are in them, and the danger of wrestling them. For he doth not affirm that *all things* are hard to be understood (and consequently liable to be wrested) but only that *some things* are of that nature:

In treating of which, *three* things offer themselves to be considered.

I. *First*, that most things in the Holy Scriptures are so far from being hard to be understood, that they are easy: Nay, all things absolutely necessary for us, are very easy.

II. *Secondly*, That those things which are not so easy, may be understood; though there be some difficulty in it. That is, they will require some pains to understand them; which should not deter us from reading; but only make us laborious to find out the sense of what we read.

III. *Thirdly*, When we do thoroughly understand, and heartily believe the things that are easie, it will abate much of that difficulty; and make other things more easie.

I.

I begin with the *first* of these; the Apostle only saith, *some things* are hard to be understood; which supposes that most are not; but rather easie: as all those things, especially, are, which are absolutely necessary to be known, and believed, and done, for the obtaining Salvation.

That which makes things easie to be understood, is the plain and perspicuous delivery of them, in the words wherein they are written, or spoken.

Now

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Now nothing can be plainer, or clearer, than the words, wherein all the great Christian Truths are revealed and delivered to us: which are so far from being obscure, that it is not easier to see the light, than it is to apprehend and understand the true meaning of them.

I will instance in some particulars; and have an Eye all the way upon St. Paul's Epistles (to which S. Peter is commonly thought to have respect) wherein, though some things be difficult, yet these are most clearly discovered.

First, That there is but *one God*, the Father, of whom are all things, as he expressly writes, 1 Cor. VIII. 6.

Secondly, That He alone is to be worshipped (as our Blessed Saviour remembers us out of *Moses*, IV. Matt. 10.) was the great thing pressed in his very entrance into any place where he preach'd, 1 Thess. I. 9, 10. XVII. Acts 23, 24.

Thirdly, As our Lord teaches us, that we are engaged by our Baptism, to worship one God, in three Persons, XXVIII. *Matth.* 19. So S. Paul affirms the same plainly enough, in that Solemn Prayer for the *Corinthi-*

ans, 2. XIII. ult. *The Grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the Love of God, and the Communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all.* Especially if it be compared with those places, wherein he affirms our Saviour, *to be over all, God blessed for ever*, IX. Rom. 5. and the Spirit, *to search even the deep things of God*; that is, to know his Mind exactly: for so it follows (1 Cor. II. 10, 11.) that as none can know the things of a man, save the spirit of man, which is in him: so the things of God knoweth no man, but the Spirit of God. Which plainly tells us, if we mind it, that the Spirit of God is *in God*, as the spirit of man is *in man*: that is, the Spirit is God himself, and therefore fully acquainted with him in all things.

There is some little labour indeed, in making this deduction; but it is very easie, if we consider all these places together.

Fourthly, And the Nature of God, none can possibly be ignorant of, who doth but look into the Holy Books. Where he will immediately see Him represented to be Almighty, most Wise, most Gracious, Faithful to his Word,

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Word, and the living God, who endures for ever. Which are Truths written there, in such great Letters, that every one who runs (as the Prophet speaks) and doth but cast a transient eye upon them, may easily read them.

Fifthly, Particularly, his infinite love and kindness towards us the children of men, lies before us so fairly, and shines so brightly in our eyes; that if we do not wilfully shut them, we cannot but read it to our infinite satisfaction. *For so God loved the world, saith our Lord Himself, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him, should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world, to condemn the world; but that the world through him might be saved, Ill. John 16, 17.* And so St. Paul writes, *But God who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ Jesus (by Grace ye are saved) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together, in heavenly places, in Christ Jesus. That in the ages to come*
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he might shew the exceeding riches of his Grace, in his kindness towards us through Christ Jesus, II. Ephes. 4, 5, 6, 7.

Who can doubt at all of the favour of God, his exceeding great and rich favour towards us, who doth but cast his eyes on such words as these; and believes the Truth of the Gospel of Christ? Which were written for this very end, that in all future Ages of the World, after the Apostles were gone, men might discern how abundant the Grace of God is, in his kindness manifested towards us in our Blessed Lord. And therefore we, in this Age of the World, as well as all that were before us, may conclude without any scruple, that *God is Love* (as *St. John* speaks) and that he will be good to us, for Christ's sake, though we have greatly offended his Majesty.

Sixthly, For that is the next thing; the kindness of God towards sinful men, and his readiness to pardon them and receive them into his favour and love again, is here also so perspicuously revealed, that there need be no question made of it. *In this was manifested the love of God towards us, because*

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cause that God sent his only begotten Son into the world, that we might live through him. Herein is love, not that we loved God, but that he loved us, and sent his Son to be the propitiation for our sins, 1 John IV. 9, 10.

And in the same manner writes St. Paul, *After the kindness and love, or pity, of God our Saviour towards man appeared, not by works of righteousness that we have done, but according to his mercy he saved us, by the washing of regeneration, and the renewing of the Holy Ghost. That being justified by his Grace, we should be made heirs, according to the hope of Eternal life, III. Tit. 4, 5.*

Nay, for this very end, he saith, God shewed mercy to him, though a very great Sinner, a Blasphemer of Christ, a Persecutor of his Disciples, that men might be encouraged to hope in God; if they would repent and turn to Him, as he did, 1 Tim. I. 14, 15, 16, &c. Read the place, and you will see, that all the wit of man cannot devise plainer and clearer words, to express the exceeding Grace of God towards all men: which is declared

so fully, as well as familiarly, that his words need no Commentary to explain them, and make them more easie to be understood.

Seventhly, With the same Evidence, the Gospel speaks of the way and means, whereby this Forgiveness was procured for us: and that is by the Death, and by the Resurrection of our Lord Jesus. *Who was delivered, saith the Apostle, for our offences, and rose again for our justification, IV. Rom. ult. In whom we have redemption through his blood, the forgiveness of sins, according to the riches of his Grace, I. Ephes. 7. It is God that justifies, who is he that condemneth? It is Christ that died, yea rather that is risen again; who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us; who shall separate us from the love of Christ? &c. VIII. Rom. 34, 35, &c.*

It would be endless to recite all that the Scriptures speak on this subject; in terms as plain and clear as these: So that we cannot reasonably doubt, if we believe these Books, that by one offering of Himself, he hath perfected for ever them that are sanctified, as the
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Author to the *Hebrews* speaks, X. 12, 13, 14. *This man after he had offered one Sacrifice for sins, for ever sate down at the right hand of God; from henceforth expecting, till his enemies be made his footstool: For by one offering he hath perfected for ever, &c.*

They that would make any other Satisfaction necessary, by the Merits of Saints; or any other Oblation of Christ necessary, but that one which he Himself offered, directly contradict the express words of this Book; which are as easie to be understood, as any that the most studied invention of men can indite.

Eighthly, And so is the way and means, whereby these Blessings, thus purchased, are communicated to us, viz. the Mediation and Intercession of Christ Jesus, on our behalf, whereby he can save us to the utmost, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for us, VII. *Heb.* 25. Nor is there any other that can perform this Office for us, but he; for as there is one God, so one Mediator between God and man, the man Christ Jesus, as St. Paul teaches in so many words, 1 *Tim.* II. 4. Whereby,

by, we cannot but in reason think, he means there is *no more than One Mediator*; as, it is certain, there is *no more than one God*: who communicates his Mind to us by this alone Mediator, as we must address our selves to Him by no other.

Which St. Paul declares more fully in 1 Cor. VIII. 5, 6. Where he saith, though there be *many that are called Gods* (as there are gods many, and lords many) yet to us (Christians) there is *but one God the Father*, of whom are all things, and we in (or for, or to) him; and one Lord Jesus Christ, by whom are all things, and we by him. That is, As there is but one sole Fountain of all good, unto whom we are to direct our Prayers, and all we do (for the first Cause must be our last End) so He derives all unto us by his Son Jesus Christ alone; by whom therefore, and by Him alone, we are to go to God the Father, for what we are desirous to receive from Him. None else in Heaven or Earth, is capable of this Honour, but this great Lord alone (whom *the Father loveth, and hath given all things into his hands* (III. John 35.) as any one

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one that reads this place seriously, may easily discern.

And therefore they who betake themselves unto any other Patron, to recommend them to the Heavenly Grace, are concerned to hide this Book from the Peoples Eyes; and to discourage them from reading it, by telling them, it is obscure and hard to be understood. For they who do read it, see this truth so fully and expressly asserted there, that, if their minds be not prejudiced, they cannot think it safe to implore the assistance of any other in the Heavenly Court: which apparently derogates from the Honour of our Lord, and is highly offensive, upon many accounts, to Almighty God. Who hath appointed Him to take care of our affairs, who loves us better than any Saint or Angel can do, because he dyed for us; and therefore is more inclined to have compassion upon us, because he hath that feeling of our infirmities, which no Angel was ever touched withal, nor any Saint in such a degree as he was: Who can also do more for us, than all the Angels in Heaven put together; being the Lord of Glory.

Ninth.

Ninthly, Which is another thing here clearly revealed; the Power and Glory of the Lord Jesus, at the right Hand of God. *We all with open face* (without any Veil drawn before our Eyes) *behold as in a Glass the Glory of the Lord*, as St. Paul speaks, 2 Cor. III. ult. The Gospel, that is, which he preached, and which we read, represents his transcendent Majesty so evidently; that our own Face doth not appear more clearly to us in a Glass, than Christ is set before us there, as advanced *far above all Principality and Power* (to use his words in another place, 1. Ephes. 21.) *and Might and Dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this World, but also in that which is to come.* God having put all things under his Feet, and given him to be Head over all things to the Church.

What may we not expect from so great a Prince, who hath all things at his command; and that for the good of his Church: if we faithfully address our selves to God by Him alone?

Tenthly, I might say the like of the
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rest of the Articles of the Christian Faith ; which are here plainly taught.

But I shall only add that , as the way and means whereby Christ procured and doth dispense the Divine Grace to us, is evidently declared in the Holy Scriptures : so is the means whereby we may hope to obtain the Benefit of his Sacrifice, Satisfaction and Intercession with God for us. *Repent, and be converted, and your sins shall be blotted out.* (III. *Acts* 19.) are words plain enough to be understood. And so are these, *Come unto me all ye that are weary and heavy laden, and I will refresh you. Take my Yoke upon you, and learn of me, for I am meek and lowly in heart : and ye shall find rest unto your Souls.* XI. *Matth.* 28, 29. And these; *In Christ Jesus, neither Circumcision avail-eth any thing, nor Uncircumcision, but Faith working by Love ; a new Creature ; or keeping the Commandments of God.* For in all these terms , for the greater clearness sake, and that no man may be mistaken , is this matter declared by St Paul, 1 *Cor.* VII. 19. V. *Gal.* 6. VI. *Gal.* 15.

And therefore that *the Grace of the Gospel*

Gospel teaches us, that, denying Ungodliness and Worldly Lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and godly in this present World (2 Tit. II. 12.) is as clear as the Sun.

Nor are the particular duties, which belong to every ones place and state, less clear and conspicuous, than these general lines of our Duty, which the Apostle hath drawn in those comprehensive words. For when the same Apostle, *St. Paul*, directs his Speech (as he doth commonly in the latter part of his Epistles) unto Masters of Families and Servants, unto Husbands and Wives, Fathers and Children; his Rules are as plain and easie to be understood by us now, as they were to those persons who first received them.

So plain and easie they are unto all Ages, so familiar, especially to men of meaner rank, that *I much doubt* (saith a great Champion of our Church, in his Comments on the Creed *) *whether the Pope himself, and the whole Conclave of Cardinals, would be able in this present Age, to speak so plainly unto the capacity, or so familiarly*

**Dr. Jackson*, Lib. 2. Cap. 12.

miliarly to the experience of men of their *Quality unto whom the Apostle wrote.* For, setting aside the absolute Truth and Infallibility of his Doctrines, the manner of delivering them is so familiar, so lowly, so heartily humble, so natural, and so well-befitting such mens disposition in their sober thoughts, as were impossible for the Pope to attain unto, or imitate; unless he would lay aside his Court-State, and for seven years addict himself unto familiarity, with such men in a Pastoral Charge.

The same may be said concerning his way of speaking, when he sets down any other Christian Duties, whether private or publick. No man could ever pretend any difficulty in this part of the Holy Writings, which treat of a Holy Life. All the difficulty is in mens wills; to be perswaded to consent to be governed by these Laws, which they cannot chuse but well enough understand.

And that they may be perswaded, Christ hath left us exceeding great and precious Promises, which contain the greatest part of the Gospel-Grace: the very end of which is to
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move us to live soberly, righteously, and godly. *Having therefore these promises, (dearly beloved) let us cleanse our selves from all filthiness of the flesh and spirit, perfecting holiness in the fear of God,* 2 Cor. VII. 1.

What words can be more perspicuous than these? And with the same clearness these Books pronounce the indispensable necessity of a holy life; without which the riches of God's Grace cannot save us. *Follow peace and holiness, without which no man shall see the Lord,* XII. Heb. 14. *Know ye not, that the unrighteous shall not inherit the Kingdom of God? Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor idolaters, nor adulterers, &c nor thieves, nor covetous, nor drunkards, nor revilers, nor extortioners, shall inherit the Kingdom of God,* 1 Cor. VI. 9, 10. *Now the works of the flesh are manifest (mark that word) adultery, fornication, uncleanness, lasciviousness, Idolatry, witchcraft, hatred, variance, emulation, wrath, strife, seditions, heresies, envyings, murders, drunkenness, revellings, and such like; of which I have told you before in times past, that they which do such things shall not inherit the*
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Kingdom of God. But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance; against such there is no law. And they that are Christ's have crucified the flesh, with the affections and lusts. If we live in the Spirit, let us also walk in the Spirit, V. Gal. 19, 20, &c.

What shall I say more? All the Promises of God, which put us in hope; and all his Threatnings, which are designed to put us in fear (upon which two Hinges, all Religion turns) are, you see already, declared so expressly and clearly, that there can be no dispute about them. For this is the promise, which he hath promised, even Eternal life, 1 Joh. II. 25. and the wrath of God is revealed from Heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness, I. Rom. 18. For He will render to every man according to his deeds; to them who by patient continuance in well doing seek for honour, glory and immortality, eternal life: But to them that are contentious, and do not obey the truth, but obey unrighteousness, indignation and wrath; tribulation and anguish upon

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every soul of man that doth evil, of the Jew first, and also of the Gentile. But glory, honour and peace to every man that worketh good, to the Jew first, and also to the Gentile. For there is no respect of persons with God, II. Rom. 6, 7, &c.

If these words be not intelligible, there can be no such thing as plain speaking in the World? And it is as plainly and intelligibly written, that *God hath appointed a day wherein he will judge the world in righteousness, (XVII. Acts 3 1.)* when he will make good all his Promises and Threatnings; and that our Lord Christ is that great Person by whom He will judge it. All our labour, all our Art, can never make a Proposition to be understood, if all these things which I have mentioned (which are the substance of Religion) be not obvious and clear to all, who will take the pains to read the Holy Scriptures, and consider them.

And therefore they do a great injury to the Grace of God, and to the Care and Love of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Head of the Church; who endeavour to perswade us, the Holy Scriptures are so obscure, that it is
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not fit the people should look into them, for fear of mistaking, and running themselves into dangerous Errors and Heresies. They may do so, though they do not read the Scriptures, by following their own vain imaginations, and by dreaming upon that which they hear out of the Scriptures, or which starts up in their own fancy: but if they look into the Scriptures to know how to be saved, and have no other end, nor neglect humbly to implore the Divine guidance, they cannot mistake; but may be easily and fully satisfied. For God hath told us all, that *Jesus is the Saviour*; and that he is the Author of Eternal Salvation, *to them that obey Him*; and his *Commandments*, wherein we are to obey Him, as they are not *grievous*, so they are *obvious*, and may be met with all every where, if we have a mind to learn them; and he hath set *Pastors and Teachers* in his Church, *for the perfecting of the Saints, for the work of the Ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, &c.* IV. E-

phes. 11, 12, 13. So that no man, having such directors, can miss the way that leads to Eternal life; unless both he and they will wilfully shut their eyes: and on purpose turn aside from the path, which the Holy Scripture shows unto them. And if the words of the Spirit of God (which are as bright as a Lamp, to give light unto our feet) may be mistaken or abused; then no man, no company of men; no Interpreter, no Council, can draw up any words but they may be perverted, by those who have no mind to be directed by them; but are concerned to put another sense, than they intended, upon them.

And indeed it is no slight Argument that the Holy Scriptures are easie to be understood in all things necessary for our Instruction, because God would have all, even the meanest capacity, to read them: as I have proved in the foregoing Part of this work, beyond any reasonable contradiction. It would have been in vain to require men, *to search the Scriptures*, as not only God, but his Church in ancient times, did; if they could not readily

ly there meet with satisfaction.

The Doctors of the Church of *Rome*, I know, argue the quite contrary way; therefore you should not read them, because they are obscure. But which will you chuse to believe? God, who bids you read them, from whence you may conclude they are not obscure; or men, who bid you not read them, because they are obscure? You may most safely conclude they are not obscure, because God bids you read them; for this is a right Conclusion from Divine Premisses: whereas the other Conclusion that you should not read them, is drawn from a false Supposition, directly contradictory to what follows from the Command of God to be conversant in them; which is, that they are not so obscure, but in things necessary we may easily understand them. Otherwise, our Blessed Lord, the Wisdom of the Father, would not have bidden men search them: nor would his Apostles have ceased to employ their pains, till they had made such things painer, if they had not thought they had set them down so plainly in their Writings, that no man,

who would read, could be ignorant of them.

That's another thing worthy observation; That the very End for which the Gospel was written by the Apostles, reproves this Pretence of obscurity. St. John tells us, it was that we might believe, XX. *Joh. ult. These things are written, that ye might believe that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God; and that believing, ye might have life through his Name.*

By whose Authority did St. John write; or by whose assistance did he perform this work? Was it not by our Saviour's, and by the guidance of the Holy Ghost?

And to what purpose was he inspired, but to work Faith in those mens Souls, who read his Writings? And what Faith was this? only the belief of some few things, which are clear enough, but not sufficient to make us wise unto Salvation? No such matter. He wrote that we might have so much Faith, as should give us Eternal life, through Christ Jesus.

Now who can believe, that he who wrote by that Spirit, which perfectly
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knew the several Tempers and Capacities of every Age ; and with an intention to breed saving Faith in their Souls , should yet write so obscurely , that he could not be understood of them , for whose good and benefit he wrote ?

Nothing but interest ; that is , nothing but that very wicked Temper , which blinded the Jews , and made them deny our Saviour and crucifie him , can induce a man to be of this opinion.

It will be replied , I know by some , that however , here is a confession , that *some things* are hard to be understood : and therefore it is best to keep the Scriptures from the people , because they may do themselves hurt by those things.

Unto which I have answered already ; that if they seek for Nothing but Salvation , and how to please God in order thereunto ; they will not do themselves hurt by any thing they meet withal in the Holy Writings. But for further satisfaction , I shall proceed to give a brief account of the *second* thing , I propounded to be considered : which is,

II.

THAT the Apostle doth not say some things *cannot* be understood ; but that they are *hard* to be understood. There is some labour required to the understanding them : which , if we will take , we may comprehend their meaning.

It would be a long Work to examine what things , in St. *Paul's* Epistles , the Apostle St. *Peter* may be thought to point at , as difficult to be understood. But the inquiry might be very much shortned , by one small observation : which may be sufficient to inform us , That , if men take heed , the Scriptures are not so difficult to be understood ; as Laziness , and careless Reading , and Interest would make them.

It is only this ; to what the word *WHICH* relates , when the Apostle saith , *In WHICH are some things* , &c. Whether to St. *Paul's* Epistles , or to those things , which St. *Peter* is treating of in this Chapter , as St. *Paul* doth in some of his Epistles ? And it is manifest

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nifest to those, who will be at so much pains, as to ask any honest man that understands the Original Language; that it refers, not to all St. *Paul's* Epistles, but to those things of which St. *Peter* had been discoursing. For the words are not ἐν αὐτῇ, *in which Epistles*, but ἐν οἷς, *in which things*, or among which things, some are hard to be understood

Now that which St. *Peter* had been speaking of, is the *Coming of our Lord*; concerning which he saith St. *Paul* also had written: and therefore it is most reasonable to determine that S. *Peter* here means, that in those things, which St. *Paul* had written in his Epistles, about *Christ's Coming*, there were some things not so easie to be understood as the rest.

And what great matter is it, if we be ignorant of *some things* relating to his Coming; since we know and are certain, by undoubted words of the Apostles, that He will come; and come to render unto all according to their works?

Let us believe this, and then we shall find no difficulty in the use which

St. Peter makes of it, in the *eleventh* verse. *What manner of persons ought we to be in all holy conversation and godliness?*

It would be very ill for us, if Christ should come now, and find us, instead of reforming our lives, by practising the plain Truths of the Gospel, disputing against that Gospel, and casting reflections upon it; as an obscure Book, which is more apt to breed Heresies, than to teach men the way to Heaven. And whensoever He doth come, it will not be easie for some men to answer this Charge, which will be brought against them, of aspersing his Will and Testament on this fashion; as if it were apt to make his Children fall out, and not rather agree together in pious Love and Charity.

But let those who are concern'd look to that; let us, who enjoy the liberty of reading his Holy Will, and are encouraged so to do, only endeavour, as St. Paul speaks, *to have our conversation as becomes the Gospel.* And when we meet with any thing which we do not understand therein; let our next
thoughts

thought be, that there is enough which we do understand : and that if we practise it, and will take pains, we may in time understand the rest, as far as concerns us in our state and condition of life.

For it is easie to show, that if we extend the meaning of *St. Peter* further (as we are wont to do) and look into all those parts of *St. Paul's* Epistles, that are thought the hardest to be understood ; we may, with some diligence and observation, comprehend the meaning of them well enough. And till we use that diligence, we ought not to accuse the Scriptures of obscurity, but our selves of negligence.

All, it is true, cannot use that diligence which is necessary to understand him in all points ; because their business will not permit it : but it is as true, that, as it is not necessary they should understand him in all things so, if they could use that diligence which is requisite, they might (for any thing that can be seen in *St. Peter's* words) understand him throughout. For he only saith, there are difficult things
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in *St. Paul*: but difficulties are short of impossibilities; and we see very great difficulties, in other matters, overcome by mens industry and God's blessing. And therefore they may be overcome here, by those who make it their business, and have capacity to comprehend his meaning.

And if they do not understand every particular expression or passage; yet his scope and drift, in the whole discourse, may with careful attention and observation, be clearly discerned.

At least, there is Nothing in *St. Peter's* words which contradict this; and therefore they are vainly alledged to prove the obscurity and difficulty of the Scriptures: when they can extend but to *some places* of Scripture, *i. e.* *St. Paul's* Epistles; and but to *some things* in them; nay, but to *some things*, I have shown, in *one particular Discourse* in them, about the Coming of Christ; which have no further obscurity in them neither, but what is only an exercise of our diligence, by which they may be understood.

But just thus other places are wrested to prove the obscurity of the Scriptures.

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ptures. I will instance in one or two. The Abridger of Controversies fears not to alledge the VIII. *Acts* 30, 31. to this purpose. Where St. *Philip* asks the Eunuch, if he understood what he read, and he confesses he did not; but asks him again, *How can I, except some man should guide me?* From whence he concludes, they are not easie to be understood.

To which the Reply is so easie, that he must have a film before his eyes, who doth not see that this place is an Argument against them that alledge it. For it proves (as I showed in the first Part) that men did then read the Scriptures, though they did not understand what they read. And it proves not that the Eunuch understood Nothing; but only that he did not understand that particular place which St. *Philip* found him reading. And that was a place in a Prophecy, which hath some obscurity in it, till it be accomplished, though not afterward. And it was but one thing he did not understand in that Prophecy: for he knew *what* the Prophet said, but could not tell of *whom*. *I pray thee tell me,*
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saith he to the Evangelist, of whom *speaketh the Prophet, of himself, or of some other?* That was all the inquiry? the difficulty lying in that one single point, and in that also only for a time: for by the help of an Interpreter he soon understood the Prophecy was fulfilled, and in whom it was fulfilled. So that this very place hath now no difficulty at all in it unto us, when we read it; though it was at that time difficult to him.

What a number of insufficiencies are there in this allegation (as Bishop *Montague* justly complains) to prove the Scriptures are hard to be understood? All that can be made of it is, that one place of Scripture was obscure; in a particular case; and in one point only of that case; and at that time; and (I may further add) to a stranger, who was not of the Jewish Nation; and so was not from the beginning acquainted with their Books: who notwithstanding, with a little help, presently found it was no longer hard to be understood; but very easie, as it is now to us.

This is enough both to show how
insuffi-

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insufficient the proofs are which are brought to oppose our Doctrine; and that the difficulties we at present find in some places, may be overcome; and that one means to overcome them, is by the help of a wise Interpreter: who may (in many cases at least) presently satisfy us, and take away the obscurity.

There is another instance of such weak proofs, in the same Author: who alledges XXIV. *Luke 25.* to prove the difficulty of understanding the Scriptures, and therefore the danger of reading them; because the Disciples of Christ themselves, who had been taught by him, did not understand them, and therefore are reproached by our Saviour in these sharp terms, *O fools and slow of heart to believe all the Prophets have spoken, &c.*

Where it is manifest, they were only some parts of Scripture which they did not understand; and those were the *Prophets*, which had some obscurity, as I said, till their accomplishment; and Prophecies only concerning one thing, viz. his Death and Passion which he was to undergo, before

fore he could ascend to the Throne of his Glory : which were hard to them at that present, but are now easie by our Saviour's interpretation : and the question is not, what the Scriptures were in *those days* (when notwithstanding they read them, or else they could not have been blamed for not understanding them) but what they are *now* unto us, who have the Writings of the Apostles whom He illuminated : And *lastly*, his calling them *Fools*, for their slowness and dulness to believe, is an evident proof that even *then*, there was not so much a disability in the two Disciples, to understand what the Prophets said ; as a non-attention of mind, heedlessness, and want of consideration, to things which were not of themselves obscure and difficult.

However, our Lord had pity upon them all, and *opened their understanding*, that they might understand the Scriptures, v. 45. which the poorest Members of the Church do now, in those things wherein they were at that present ignorant ; being fully perswaded, that it behoved Christ to suffer, and to rise from the dead the third day, which
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were the things he then showed them, were written of him.

I conclude this with a brief state of this Case. Some places of Holy Scripture are hard to be understood by some persons, and by some capacities, and in some ages and times, and some matters, that are not of general concernment: but in that which concerns men of all ages, capacities and conditions, and to every man in his order and vocation, according to the measure of God's gifts bestowed on him, we affirm, with the greatest reason, that the Scripture is plain and easie to be understood: provided men have a will to learn what they are to believe and do, though it be never so cross to their inclinations, interests, affections and passions. If these be suffered to intermeddle, the Gospel tells us before-hand, in plain words, that men will not see, even when they see: according to those words very often mentioned by our Lord and by his Apostles, *Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and shall not perceive, &c.* by reason, that is, of their pride and self-conceit,

conceit, worldly-mindedness and ambition, and such like things: which blinded the eyes of those, that loved *darkness rather than light, because their deeds were evil.* But *this was their condemnation* (as our Saviour tells us in the same breath, III. *John* 19.) which it could not have been, unless the Mind and Will of God had been clearly discovered unto them.

III.

WHICH leads me now to the *third* thing proposed to Consideration, in this *Part* of my Discourse; that when we have thoroughly digested, and do heartily believe the things, that are easie and plain, in the Holy Scripture, that will abate much of the difficulty which is in other places; and prepare our minds for acquaintance with them. Which I might wave here in this place, because it will be sufficiently cleared in the *last Part* of this little Treatise; concerning those that *wrest* the Scriptures to their own destruction.

But since it is profitable to have things

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things distinctly represented; I shall say something to it by it self.

There is a near Alliance between all Truths: and the more familiar any of them are to our minds, the better disposed we are to come to the knowledge of all the rest. But there are some of greater force than others, to widen the capacity of our minds, for the entertainment of Divine Truth; and to free them from all opposite qualities and impediments, that they may entertain it easily. And they are a deep sense of, and an hearty affection unto, all those plain Lessons, which teach us our whole Christian duty: which if we thoroughly learn, we are certainly the Friends of God; and the more likely to be illuminated by him to understand the highest Mysteries, as far as we are concerned in them, and our minds are able to reach them. For *the secret of the Lord is with them that fear him: and his Covenant is to make them know it,* XXV. Psal.

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And therefore it was no ill advice, which Cardinal *Pool* (if I mistake not) gave for the reading of St. *Paul's* Epistles,

stles, to begin always at the latter end of them. For were we well versed therein; by a serious study, that is, and sincere practice of those Christian duties, which he there commends unto us, we should see the way more clearly, to come to the sense of the former part of them: which is commonly harder to be understood than the latter.

For our minds being truly humble and heavenly, and thereby sedate and quiet, free from ambition, covetousness, or any secular desire and design, they would be more serene and clear in themselves; and also fitter to receive irradiations from above. Whereby we might certainly discern, thus much (which is the main thing we are concerned to know) what the general aim and scope of the Apostle is in the former part of his Epistles; though we did not understand the meaning and coherence of every particular Verse.

In that, it must be confessed, there is sometimes no small difficulty; because, the Apostle writing against the Disputers of that Age, we cannot, at
this

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this distance, certainly know every little conceit or subtilty of theirs, upon which he briefly reflects and confutes, as he passes along. And yet notwithstanding, we may be abundantly satisfied in the main Points of Doctrine, which he either asserts or opposes: which is the only thing of use to us; and enough to reward the painful inquiries of the most Learned men among us. Who by all their studies cannot, perhaps, attain to the knowledge of every particular passage; nay, will not see those things that are most conspicuous to others, if they do not amend their lives by the clear light of the Scripture in other places.

For of this we may be certain, that *it is the good pleasure of God (as an excellent Man speaks) and his unalterable Decree, that the Holy Scriptures (at least in their drift and design) shall be plain and easie to such, as faithfully practise, their most plain and easie Precepts: but hard and difficult to be understood aright, of such as wilfully transgress them.*

There is nothing more perspicu-
ously

ously set down in Holy Scripture, than this ; as would be easie to show (if it would not inlarge this Book too much) from such words as those of St. *Peter*, *God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace to the humble.* And therefore should we admit of any Authority equivalent to the Holy Scriptures, the question would still remain, Whether the Infallibility of that Authority could take away that blindness of heart, which by God's just Judgment, falls upon all those, who *detain the Truth of God in Unrighteousness.* If for their disobedience to evident and plain Truths, God punish them with such spiritual darkness, that they discern not his Will revealed in his written Word, no other infallible Authority can enlighten them ; and make those scales fall from their eyes, which hinder their sight in the means of their Salvation. They will everlastingly go on in darkness ; because having Light presented to them, they preferred darkness before it. Those naughty affections, which have kept the Light of the glorious Gospel of Christ, from shining into them, will close their eyes

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eyes so fast, that no other Light will open them. But they must either receive and follow the plain directions of Holy Scripture, and recover their sight by a sincere practice of known Duties; or walk on still in darkness, and remain in the shadow of death to the end of their days.

Unto which plain direction, if men would unfeignedly submit; if thereby they were not led to the understanding of harder Scriptures, they would however have this benefit; that they would be secured from misunderstanding them. My meaning is, that by understanding, believing, and keeping close, to the practice as well as knowledge, of the easie and evident Truths of the Gospel, we should be preserved from putting any dangerous interpretation upon those places which are hard and difficult. Ignorant of them we might continue, or perhaps mistake their meaning: but still innocently; so as not to do hurt to our selves or others by them.

An illustrious Example of which we have in St. *Austin's* Book *De Fide & Operibus*. Where discoursing (*Chap. XV.*)

XV.) upon that place of St. Paul, 1 Cor. III. 12, 13. (which he takes to be one of those, which St. Peter saith are hard to be understood in his Epistles) he tells us that some understood, *the building gold, silver, precious stones upon this foundation*, to be meant of adding good works to Faith in Christ: and building *Wood, hay, stubble* upon it, to be meant of those that held the same Faith, but did evil. From whence they fancied, that by certain pains of Fire, such evil men might be purged, to obtain Salvation, by virtue of the Foundation; that is, by a right Faith only: because the Apostle saith, v. 15. *they should be saved, yet so as by fire.*

But if this be a true interpretation of this place, saith that Excellent Father, then all those places of Scripture, which have no obscurity, no ambiguity in them, must be taken to be false. As for Example, that of St. Paul in the same Epistle, *Though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have no Charity, I am Nothing*: and that of St. James, *What doth it profit, brethren, if a man say he hath faith, but hath no works? Can faith*

faith save him? And that place also will be false, *Be not deceived, neither fornicators, nor they that serve Idols, nor Adulterers, &c. shall inherit the Kingdom of God.* And that also, *The Works of the flesh are manifest, which are, adultery, fornication, uncleanness, &c. of which I tell you again, as I have done formerly, that they who do such things, shall not inherit the Kingdom of God.* These are all false, if that interpretation be true. St. Paul contradicts himself; and in this obscure place, clashes with his plain words: for according to this Exposition, if men only believe and be baptized, they shall be saved by fire, though they persevere in such wicked courses as those now mentioned.

And then I do not see to what purpose our Lord said, *If thou wilt enter into life, keep the Commandments*; telling him what belongs unto good manners. And how will that be true, which he tells us he will say to them on his left hand, *Go ye cursed, &c.* whom He sends to Hell-fire, not because they did not believe on him, but because they did not do good works.

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Thus that Father goes on, heaping up a great many other places, which evidently speak to the same purpose, and then concludes : ‘ If therefore these things, and innumerable others, which may be found in the Holy Scriptures without any ambiguity, be false; then that sense may be true concerning the *wood, hay and stubble*, viz. that they shall be saved by fire, who only holding Faith in Christ, have neglected good Works. *Si autem & vera & clara sunt*, &c. but if these things be both true, and also clear; then without doubt, another sense of the Apostle’s words is to be sought for. And they are to be put in to the number of those, which *S. Peter* saith are hard to be understood: which men ought not to pervert to their own destruction, by endeavouring from them (against the most evident Testimonies of the Scripture) to make the most lewd people secure of obtaining Salvation, though they pertinaciously continue in their wickedness, not at all changed by amendment, or repentance.

‘ As for the true sense of that Scripture,

'pture, though he ventures at it, yet he
 'faith, in the next Chapter, he had ra-
 'ther be informed by those who are
 'more learned and more understand-
 'ing; *who can so expound it, as to let all*
 '*those things above mentioned remain true*
 '*and unshaken:* in which the Scripture
 'most openly avows that Faith profits
 'Nothing, unless it be that, which the
 'Apostle defines; that is, *Faith which*
 '*worketh by love:* but without Works
 'cannot save men, neither without
 'fire, nor by fire.

Still he sticks to this Rule, as most
 certain and unmoveable; that what-
 soever sense be given of an obscure
 Scripture, it contradicts not those
 Scriptures, which are more plain: espe-
 cially those which teach us to live well,
 and show the necessity of it; which
 none that love the Truth, as it is in
 Christ, will ever prejudice by any in-
 terpretation of Scripture whatsoever.

It is out of my way, to attempt the
 true meaning of the place now mentio-
 ned: having no other business in hand
 at present, but to show that by adhe-
 ring, as this Holy man did, to the
 evident Truths in the Scripture, they

will never permit us to put any bad and pernicious sense, upon those that are less evident. Let us stick, as he did, to this Rule; and we shall either put an harmless sense upon them, or none at all.

But then, we must, as I said, be heartily in love with these plain Truths, and frame our lives according to them; for else we shall not use due care, not to cross them in our Doctrine, if we cross them in our Deeds: but rather be content that by false glosses upon other places, where the fraud will be less discernable, the Light of those glorious Truths should be obscured, and the power and force of them enervated and broken. For what will not men say, and do, to defend themselves in their sins, even against the clearest Convictions of Gods Holy Word? which their bad affections teach them to oppose; nay, make it their interest to resist.

And here it may be fit to take this occasion, to give a few directions, for the right understanding of the Holy Scriptures: which if we observe, in our reading them, we shall not only
be

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be preserved from dangerous mistakes, but reap great benefit by them. And I shall the rather do it, because it will be a good introduction to the *Third* Part of this Discourse.

I. The first of them is a Rule, which is necessary in all Sciences, or parts of Knowledge; *viz. to learn easie things first.* We can have no sound Understanding in the Scriptures, unless we will follow their own Method; which is to learn first, to *fear God, and keep his Commandments*; for therein lies *the beginning of Wisdom*, as he often tells us.

It is against the very direction which the Scripture gives us, to be so confident as to venture presently into all the depths, that are in it; and to lose our time in puzzling our minds to untie the knots of difficult places. For they are not to be salved but by those, who are well acquainted with what the Scripture principally aims at; which it teaches us in plain and easie words: and therefore they must be first learnt, as our Guides to those things which are of higher contemplation.

And he who is resolved upon this Method, will find plain Truths enow to busie and imploy an honest and pious mind a long time : by which he is to prepare and fit himself for more difficult inquiries ; if it be needful for him to make them. Though the truth is, ordinary Capacities may safely pass by those things that are hard and obscure ; and content themselves with the knowledge of easie and perspicuous Doctrines , without any further search : consulting thereby best for their own ease and quiet , and for the Peace of the Church of God.

And as for those whose profession it is, to devote themselves to the study of all Holy Writ ; even they must be sure, for their own safety and others, to lay the Foundation well here , by thoroughly digesting the Doctrines which are after Godliness , and deeply tincturing (as I may say) their minds therewith , before they meddle with other matters. For a sense of true Goodness , will be as a Light to guide us in the interpreting those things which seem dark , and need something to illustrate them. And what

what can we imagine that should be, but something contained in the same Book; even the true Light of Life, the Light which chases away all mens evil desires, and the deeds of darkness; which makes the Soul pure, and without prejudice; which disposes it to know God, and to love him, and to love all men for his sake? This will instruct us how to interpret all the rest; and not suffer us to entertain any sense of them in our minds, which is repugnant to the Nature of God, and hinders the practice and increase of true Godliness, or prejudices Charity, and disturbs Christian Society: but conform all our thoughts unto a happy agreement with those great and obvious Truths.

Which therefore let us observe and mark, as the very Life and Soul of Religion; nay, let us imprint them on our minds, as the most necessary to be known, and remembred, and carried constantly in mind, that we may never admit any thing to their prejudice. For unless we be thus disposed, we shall not only trouble our selves to no purpose, but confound all things;

and overturn the whole Frame of Religion. We shall be just like that Fool, whom *Melancthon* speaks of, whose work it was to carry fuel daily to the Kitchen; and coming to a great Pile of Wood, where little pieces lay uppermost, and the greatest below, he would needs begin at the bottom: for which he gave this wise reason, That it was good to do the hardest work first, and then he should be better able to deal with that which was easie. I need not make the application to those who love to perplex themselves with some deep, and I may say, dangerous Points (if not well understood) before they are well studied in the common Doctrines of Godliness, and have learnt what it is to be a Christian.

This is a preposterous course; contrary to the clear light and guidance of the Holy Books; which teach us in the first place, to make this inquiry, *What shall we do to be saved?* And we are sure none can be saved, but they who are obedient to the Lord Jesus; whose Faith therefore teaches us to study his Precepts, before we meddle with other

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matters. And these Precepts, as they are not grievous to those that obey them ; so they are not hard to be learnt in order to that obedience. But whatsoever concerns our Duty to God and Man, and the Duty of every particular person in the relation wherein they stand ; of Parents and Children, Husbands and Wives, Masters and Servants, Princes and People, Teachers and Learners, are all, I have shown, delivered here, with such plainness and simplicity, that no Book in the World ever taught them in this manner. About these therefore, in all reason, together with the common Principles of Christian Faith, we must imploy our most earnest care to settle them in our minds ; and make them the Rule of all the rest.

But it is not enough to bring these things into our minds ; I must add another Rule no less necessary than this : which is,

II. That *to do what we know, is the way to know more what we have to do.*

This I have suggested already in the body of the foregoing Discourse ; and

therefore shall only commend the serious practice of one particular Duty: which is so frequently mentioned in the Holy Scriptures, that from thence we ought to conclude, it is of exceeding great moment It is, *Humility; not to think of our selves more highly than we ought to think; nor to be wise in our own conceits: but to think soberly, and to be lowly in our own eyes.*

There is a number of Precepts of the same import with these: the meaning of which he ought to study diligently, and then heartily obey, who would advance to a higher degree of knowledge: for *the meek (i. e. the humble) will be guide in judgment: and the meek will be teach his way.*

If a man begin at first to think wrong of himself, he is not like to hit right in other things: but the easier mistake in them, when he hath suffered such a cheat to be put upon him, as to have a vain opinion of himself; whom he hath better opportunities to be acquainted withal, than any thing else.

And on the contrary, he that thinks right, in the first things he inquires into;

into; hath great encouragement and security to proceed, with hope of good success in all that follows.

It is true, when a man knows himself, he finds that he is a Creature apt to mistake; prone to judge amiss; forward to follow little fancies rather than reason, or reason dipt in passion and interest, and to forsake that which is pure and unbiassed.

But this is so far from being a discouragement or hinderance to him, in searching after God's Holy Truth, that it is the very thing which disposes him for it, and will secure him in it. For if he keep this humble sense in his mind, how weak and frail a Creature he is, it will do him great service; by preserving him from rashness, in embracing any thing without great deliberation; and much more from hastiness, in venting any singular conceit; and still much more from pertinacity, in defending it, if it be vented; and most of all, from Faction and siding, and uncharitable courses; and from that great danger of mistaking, and never reforming an erroneous Understanding.

More:

More particularly, in this business of reading the Scriptures, this humble sense of his own weakness will, *First*, make him read them with greater care, attention and diligence; remembering how prone he is to mistake, even when he is very serious.

And therefore, *Secondly*, it will make him distrust his own best endeavour, without Divine assistance: which he will pray and wait for, with an humility as great as the sense of his unworthiness to receive it.

And, *Thirdly*, it will dispose him to listen unto, and inquire after the sense and judgment of other men, (whom he hath reason to think abler than himself) and to be willing to learn of them.

Fourthly, And more particularly, incline him to follow the Guides of Souls: not with a blind obedience; but with a due attention to their directions, and a great deference to their Judgment, and (where any doubt is publickly determined) a quiet submission to their Authority.

And, *Lastly*, (to name no more) content himself with plain, and safe, and

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and necessary things : at least , preserve him from being too forward, before he be well prepared , to meddle with those things which are not within every bodies reach.

Now when we consider all these blessed effects of *Humility*, we cannot but say , it is a special means to attain the knowledge of Divine things, from God : who gives grace to the humble.

St *Austin* was so sensible of this , that he advises *Epist. LVI. Dioscurus* ‘not to think of
‘any other way to attain the know-
‘ledge of the Truth , but that alone,
‘which God himself, who knows how
‘weak we are, and how apt to slip,
‘hath chalkt out for us. *Ea est autem*
‘*prima humilitas, secunda humilitas, ter-*
‘*tia humilitas.* &c. And that way , is
‘*first* Humility , *secondly* Humility,
‘*thirdly* Humility ; and shouldst thou
‘ask me never so often about the way,
‘I would give thee no other answer.
‘Not that there are no other Precepts
‘to be learnt, but unless Humility in
‘all the good we do, do *first* go before,
‘and *secondly* accompany , and *thirdly*
‘follow after ; pride and vain con-
‘ceit,

' ceit, while we are pleasing our selves
 ' in our good deed, will wrest all the
 ' profit of it out of our hand, and
 ' make us lose our labour. *Vitia quip-*
 ' *pe cetera in peccatis, superbia verò e-*
 ' *tiam in rectè factis timenda est, &c.*
 ' For though we need fear no other
 ' vice, but when we do ill; yet this
 ' may steal upon us even when we do
 ' well: and great care must be used,
 ' lest by the desire of praise, we spoil
 ' those actions which are really praise-
 ' worthy. Therefore as the noblest
 ' Orator, when he was askt, what he
 ' thought was chiefly to be observed
 ' in the Precepts of Eloquence, is said
 ' to have answered, *Pronunciation*; and
 ' being askt what next, still answered,
 ' *Pronunciation*; and the third time be-
 ' ing askt the same question, again re-
 ' plied nothing but *Pronunciation*: So
 ' as oft as thou shouldst ask me of the
 ' Precepts of Christian Religion, I
 ' would not think fit to answer any
 ' thing, but *Humility*.

This wholesome Humility then,
 which that our Lord might teach us,
 he humbled himself, let us carefully
 learn: yea, let us *be clothed with Hu-*
umility,

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mility, as *St. Peter* speaks : and always carry in mind that of *St. Paul*, *Knowledge puffeth up*. There is danger in reading and getting knowledge, unless *Humility* usher it in, and attend upon it, and perpetually go along with it : for it will not minister to the nourishing of goodness ; but to the feeding our ambition, and fomenting contention, and inflaming of indiscreet zeal, and thereby troubling the state of God's Church. But *Humility* is the Mother of meekness and peaceableness of Spirit ; which is both most capable of wisdom, and also most fit to communicate it unto others with advantage, and make it appear as lovely to them, as it is in its own nature.

We have the Authority of the Royal Prophet for it in the place before mentioned, XXV. *Psal.* 9. and of his great Son *Solomon*, whose Maxim this was, *With the lowly is wisdom*, XI. *Prov.* 2. and which is more than all, of our Blessed Lord and Saviour, who thanks his Heavenly Father (XI. *Mat.* 25.) *Because thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, that is, from*
the

the self-conceited Pharisees, *and revealed them unto babes*, single-hearted and humble persons: *even so, Father, for so it seemed good in thy sight*; this is most agreeable and pleasing to the Divine Wisdom, to communicate it self, not to those who think themselves wise, but to those who are truly desirous and studious so to be.

And so I proceed to a *third Rule*, which is a general one too, and arises from the former.

III. Which supposing that *doing God's Will* is the main thing at which a Christian ought to aim, it is evident from thence, that we ought to *propound no other end to our selves in reading the Holy Books, but that we may thereby grow more holy, and be made perfect in every good work.*

For this is certain, that if this be not always our end, we and these Holy Books do not design the same thing; and so we are never like to meet. Their design, it is visible, is *to make us wise unto Salvation, to purifie us even as our Lord is pure, to help us to perfect holiness in the fear of God.* If
we

we aim not therefore at this, they have nothing to say to us. If we lay aside these thoughts, and divert to something else in the study of the Scriptures, we shall wander in vain and unprofitable Speculations: and perhaps trouble the World, as well as our selves, with unnecessary Doctrines: which ingender strife, and destroy Charity, and disturb Peace, and turn men quite away from the practice of Piety.

If we would be truly knowing, and thoroughly wise, with the Scripture-Wisdom, we must ever draw all we know, and meet with there, unto this end: and not think we know it well, till we see how we may be made better thereby.

I cannot express this in fewer or more proper words, than *Erasmus* hath done long ago, in more places of his Works than one; particularly in his Dedication of his Paraphrase on *St. Matthew* to the Emperour *Charles* the V. 'Since the Evangelists wrote
'the Gospel to every body, I do not
'see why every body should not read
'it. And I have so handled it, that
'the

' the most illiterate may understand it.
 ' Now it will be read with the great-
 ' est profit, if when any man takes it
 ' in his hand, it be with this mind, *ut*
 ' *seipso reddatur melior*, &c. that he
 ' may be rendred better than himself:
 ' and do not accommodate the Gospel
 ' to his own affections, but correct his
 ' own life, and all his desires by the
 ' Rule of the Gospel.

I conclude this with that Saying of
Seneca; In the same plat of ground,
 the Ox seeks for grasse, the Hound
 seeks for a Hare, and the Stork for a
 Snake: and just so it is with those
 that read the same Scripture; where-
 in one seeks himself, and another seeks
 the World; one studies, that is, to
 please himself with the History of an-
 cient Times, another to furnish him-
 self with the knowledge that belongs
 to his Profession; but he alone reads
 it as he ought, who therein seeks for
 God; and desires to be *filled with the*
knowledge of his Will, that he may walk
before him in all well-pleasing, being
fruitful in every good work, I. Coloss.
 9, 10.

IV. And whosoever he is that designs this great End, and comes to learn to be good with an honest mind and heart, let him be careful to observe one Rule more; which is, *To study and well digest the first Elements of Christ's Religion.* For as he will never read, nor write exactly, that doth not learn to spell truly; and he must understand syllables before he understands words and sentences: so he will never find the saving Power of the Gospel thoroughly working on his Spirit, that keeps not the first Truths always in his mind, and deeply rooted in his Heart.

The prime Principle of our Faith is, That *Jesus is the Son of God*; that He speaks from Heaven to us the unerring Will of our Creator. The Gospel will not have any efficacy upon us, unless we carry this along in our thoughts, when we apply our selves to study it; that this is the Voice of God, this is the Mind and Will of Him that made us; how shall we escape, if we turn away from Him that speaks from Heaven to us?

This

This if we carry in mind, while we read the Scriptures, they will over-awe us, and make us have Grace to *serve God acceptably with reverence and godly fear.* We shall not dare to read them, as we do some humane History, wherein we are not all concerned, but with attention, with seriousness, and with diligence: tracing the Lord Jesus, as pious Disciples of his, in every step; observing what he said, and what he did. ‘And thus seeking, and searching, and hunting after Him every where (as *Erasmus* his words are in his Preface to his *Annotations* on the N. T.) we shall find in that most simple and rude Scripture, the ineffable Counsel of celestial Wisdom: we shall see in that foolishness of God (if we may so speak) which at first sight appears mean and contemptible, that which far excels all humane prudence, though never so sublime and admirable.

And the next Principle is like to it; viz. That *the Lord Jesus will come to judge the World in righteousness, according to his Gospel.* This if we thought of, that we shall be judged,
and

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and have Sentence passed upon us by this Rule; we could not but lay it to heart, and square our life by it. Therefore let these first Principles of Faith be strongly fixed in our mind, and always be in our thoughts: and let us think we have as much use of them, as he that reads hath of his Letters; which are the first Elements of Learning.

Then for the Principles of Practice, this is the prime, the chief, the most fundamental in the whole Gospel; *He that will be my Disciple, must deny himself, forsake all, and take up his Cross and follow me.*

This our Saviour tells his Disciples again and again, upon several occasions, X. *Matth.* 38. XVI. 24. IX. *Luke* 23. XIV. 27, 33. In the last of which places, he lets them know, that it is as foolish to think of being a Christian without learning this Lesson, as it is for a man to begin the building of a Tower, before he hath computed the Charge; or for a Prince to undertake a War, without considering both his own force, and the strength of his Opposer. The sense of which two Parables

bles our Lord summs up in these words ; *So likewise, whosoever he be of you, that forsaketh not all that he hath, he cannot be my Disciple.*

In which few words, we have this account made to our hands (as a great Doctor of ours speaks) that e're we can hope to be built up in the Faith of Christ, or safely ingage in the War against the Devil, the World and the Flesh, we must make over our interest in all that is dear unto us here, and resign it up to our Lord Christ : holding nothing so precious as his Love and his Salvation.

That is the meaning of this Lesson ; We must not prize any thing so much, as the Mercy, Grace and Favour of God in Christ Jesus. All the contentments of this life, and life it self, must not weigh so much with us, as God's good esteem of us, his affection to us, the Honour, Glory and Immortality that Christ hath promised us.

When we have once learnt this, and have it by heart, there will be no difficulty in learning all the rest. The immediate result of it will be, an unfeigned

feigned assent to the truth and goodness of all that Christ, the Prince of Life, hath revealed unto us; and an uniform obedience to his Holy Will in all things. For then there will be Nothing left to oppose him, Nothing to gainsay him; no interest, no headstrong affection and desire to resist the impulsions of Divine Truth: whose natural property is, to incline and sway the Soul to all kinds, and to every part of true goodness.

It is our duty then to ruminate upon these things over and over again, to repeat these Lessons continually to our selves; till they become familiar to us, and have seated themselves in our hearts: not thinking we know them, till we feel them; nor imagining we feel them to purpose, till we be transformed into them.

That is an excellent Saying of the Hebrews, *He that learns the Law, and doth not repeat it, is like to him that sows his seed, and never reaps, nor binds it into sheaves, that he may carry it home into his Barn.* And this; *He that repeats his Lesson an hundred times, is not so wise as he that repeats it an hundred times and one.* Let

Let us ever be telling our selves, that it is God who speaks unto us by his Son, in these Holy Books; that this is the Rule of Life, whereby we must be judged; that we must stand or fall before God, according as we keep these Sayings; that Nothing is comparable to being beloved of God; Nothing so desirable as to *have our Faith found to honour, and praise, and glory at the appearing of our Lord Jesus Christ.* And then we shall deny our selves and our own desires, commodities and interests, that God's Will may be done by us: the whole World will seem inconsiderable in our eyes, and we shall easily forgo any thing that He will not allow us to keep: according to the fundamental Rule of our Religion; *He that forsaketh not all that he hath, cannot be my Disciple. And he that taketh not his Cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me.*

I conclude this Part of my Discourse, with the words of one of the Homilies of our Church: in the *second Part* of the Exhortation to the reading and knowledge of the Holy Scriptures;

‘As

‘ As concerning the hardnes of Scri-
 ‘ pture, -he that is so weak, that he is
 ‘ not able to brook strong meat, yet
 ‘ he may suck the sweet and tender
 ‘ milk : and defer the rest till he wax
 ‘ stronger, and come to more know-
 ‘ ledge. For God receiveth the lear-
 ‘ ned and unlearned, and casteth away
 ‘ none, but is indifferent unto all. And
 ‘ the Scripture is full, as well of low
 ‘ valleys, plain ways, and easie for
 ‘ every man to use, and to walk in :
 ‘ as also of high hills and mountains,
 ‘ which few men can climb unto. And
 ‘ whosoever giveth his mind to Holy
 ‘ Scriptures, with delight, study and
 ‘ burning desire, it cannot be (saith
 ‘ *St. Chrysostom*) that he should be left
 ‘ without help.

‘ He that asketh shall have, and he
 ‘ that seeketh shall find, and he that
 ‘ knocketh shall have the door open.
 ‘ If we read once, twice, or thrice,
 ‘ and understand not, let us not cease
 ‘ so, but still continue reading, pray-
 ‘ ing, asking of others ; and so by still
 ‘ knocking, at the last the door shall
 ‘ be opened, as *St. Augustine* saith.

‘ Although many things in the Scri-
 ‘ pture be spoken in obscure Myste-
 ‘ ries; yet there is nothing spoken
 ‘ under dark Mysteries in one place,
 ‘ but the self same thing in other pla-
 ‘ ces, is spoken more familiarly and
 ‘ plainly, to the capacity both of lear-
 ‘ ned and unlearned.

‘ And those things in the Scripture,
 ‘ that be plain to understand, and ne-
 ‘ cessary for Salvation, every mans
 ‘ duty is to learn them, to print them
 ‘ in memory, and effectually to exer-
 ‘ cise them. And as for the dark My-
 ‘ steries, to be contented to be igno-
 ‘ rant in them, until such time as it
 ‘ shall please God to open them unto
 ‘ him: but not lay aside the reading of
 ‘ the whole, because of the darkness
 ‘ of such places.

‘ And briefly to conclude (as St.
 ‘ *Augustine* saith) by the Scripture all
 ‘ men may be amended, the weak be
 ‘ strengthened, and the strong be com-
 ‘ forted. So that surely, none be *En-*
 ‘ *mies to the reading of God's Word,*
 ‘ but such as either be so ignorant, that
 ‘ they know not how wholesom a thing it is:
 ‘ or else so sick, that they hate the most
 ‘ comfort.

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*'comfortable Medicine that should heal
'them : or so ungodly, that they would
'wish the people still to continue in blind-
'ness and ignorance of God.*

The End of the Second Part.

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P A R T

P A R T III.

I AM arrived now at the last of those *Three* things I propounded, to be treated of in the beginning of this Book.

That *all who read the Scriptures are not in danger to wrest them to their own hurt ; but only the unlearned and the unstable.* Such men will wrest them from their true meaning ; but so they will other Discourses , as well as the Scriptures ; and the most clear and perspicuous things , are liable to be perverted by them , as well as the difficult.

In this we shall soon be satisfied , if we consider briefly , whom the Apostle St. Peter means, by *Unlearned, and Unstable* : which will also clearly direct us , what course we are to take, that we may not wrest the Scriptures, as such men do.

Now there is no great difficulty to know , who these are, if we mind the proper use of words, and the place where they are used.

I. *UNLEARNED.*

AND for the first of these, the *Unlearned*; the Apostle cannot be thought to have respect to such as are ignorant in those parts of Knowledge, which are now commonly called *Learning* (for so the Apostles themselves were generally *ignorant and unlearned*, IV. *Acts* 13.) but to those, who are ignorant of such things as the Holy Scriptures treat of, and ought to be learnt by all Christians.

This I think all will allow; and then they are more particularly meant, who are not skilled in the first Principles of Religion. Men that know not, or mind not those common *Natural* Truths, upon which all Religion is built: nor are acquainted with those plain unquestionable Principles of *Christianity*, before mentioned in the Second Part of this Discourse.

These I take to be the *ἀμαθεῖς* here spoken of; who have not learnt so much as the first Elements, or (as the Apostle speaks VI. *Heb.* 1.) *the word of the beginning of Christ*: who want-
ing

ing the foundation of true Knowledge, will be apt to wrest every thing they read, from its proper meaning.

Such there were, even in the School of Christ, as *St. Paul* himself teaches us, who were *ever learning, and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth,* 2 Tim. III. 7. They frequented, that is, the Christian Assemblies, where they received good Instructions: but their naughty affections would not suffer the known Doctrines of Christianity to find entertainment in their minds.

Which Doctrines are such as these; That there is one God, who is perfectly just, and perfectly good, and knows the very thoughts of the heart, and changes not. And that He hath sent Jesus Christ, his only begotten Son, the Eternal Word, who was before all Worlds, to take our Nature upon him, to dye for our sins, to rise again, that he may be the Judge of all. And that He hath sent the Holy Ghost from the Father, to teach us those Rules of Faith and Holy life, whereby we shall be judged at the last Day: when he will raise up our dead

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bodies;

bodies; and give to those who have done good, everlasting Life; but send those who have done evil, into everlasting Fire.

These and such like, which depend on these, and are coherent with them, are the *Christian Learning*: which they that did not know, and believe, and accordingly practise (as I shewed in the foregoing Discourse) must needs be very great strangers to the Holy Books; and be so far from reaping any profit by them, that they would rather corrupt and abuse them to the support of their own uncertain, vain, or absurd imaginations.

Nor were they secure from this danger when they had learnt them; unless they were likewise so fixed in their minds, that they were constantly guided by them. For the Apostle here teaches us, that not only the *Unlearned*, but the *Unstable* also, wrest the Scriptures to their own destruction.

II. *UNSTABLE.*

WHO those are is now easier to determine, if what hath been said of the other, be admitted. They are such as do not stedfastly believe what they have learnt: who having entertained the Truth, do not stick to those Principles of Natural Light and plain Revelation, nor are settled in them; but sometimes believe them, and sometimes question, or disbelieve them.

Such persons the same *St. Paul* also describes in the Christian Church: who were *tossed up and down with every wind of Doctrine*, and could fix no where; but rolled in uncertainty, from one Opinion to another, till they lost themselves in Infidelity, *IV. Eph. 14.* The Principles they had received were floating in their mind, and never came to any certain constant resolution: which made them apt, on all occasions, to pervert the Scriptures, according as their own Fancy; or the confident suggestion of some bold Seducer, inclined them. For some men deliver the vainest Conceit, with such

an assurance, and earnest Zeal, that they may be well compared to a violent blast; which carries those along with it, who are not settled and confirmed in their Belief.

I may make many more words about this, but I shall scarce make it plainer; and therefore I will not endeavour it. But now desire you to mind what course these words, thus explained, direct us to take; that we may be preserved from abusing the liberty we have of consulting, on all occasions, with the Oracles of God.

There is some Learning, you see, required to the understanding of the Holy Scriptures. But you need not go far to seek it: for it consists only in the knowledge of such Natural Truths, as are engraven upon our own minds; and of those plain Doctrines of Christianity, which are revealed in God's Word so clearly, that there is no Controversie about them: especially of the great Design of Christianity, which St. *John* expresses in this short Sentence, *These things write I unto you, that ye sin not.* This is very solid and deep Learning, to know that
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The first and chief End of Divine Writings, is to teach us to live well: and the next follows in the next words of *St. John* (1. II. 1.) *If any man sin, we have an Advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the righteous, &c* Be not discouraged, if contrary to the great Design of Christianity, you fall into sin; but hope for Mercy through the Propitiation made by Christ Jesus, who will intercede for the sins of those, who heartily make this their main design and business, not to sin.

Which Truths, of both sorts, we must take some pains to fix in our minds, and root in our hearts; that our belief of them may not be shaken by any other perswasion whatsoever: much less by any sudden conceit which starts up in our minds, or is suggested to us by others.

And the way to do that, is to live by them: for nothing settles knowledge so much, as faithful practice according to it; especially when we are settled in this practice. For those *St. Peter* calls *unstable Souls* (in the Chapter before this, v. 14.) apt to be beguiled and insnared; who had not
arri-

arrived at a settled resolution and an habitual course of well-doing.

Now when this is done, which must be our first Work, there is but one Rule which I shall propose (because, if well followed, it comprehends all in it) to make our reading the Holy Scriptures safe and secure. Which is this,

Never to admit any Interpretation of Scripture from others, or fasten any sense upon them our selves, which contradicts those known Truths which we have learned, and in which we are fixed, as the undoubted Mind and Will of God. They must be the measure of all the rest: by them we must judge of all things, whether they be true or false. Whatsoever overthrows them, and will not consist with them, must be rejected: It must not make us doubt of them; but they must make us conclude, it is a safe Interpretation. And on the other side, whatsoever agrees with them, though it should happen not to be the proper meaning of a place of Scripture into which we inquire, it can do no harm, if it be entertained.

And

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And here now I shall do these *three* things.

First, Show how we are to use this Rule.

Secondly, How necessary it is to keep to it.

Thirdly, How readily thereby we may salve many seeming difficulties in the Holy Scripture : at least pass by them safely, if we observe it.

I.

Concerning the first, I shall only say these *two* things.

I. *First*, That we must *never admit any Interpretation on a sudden* : till we have examined, how it agrees with the Principles of known and undoubted Truth.

Fancy will be suggesting things to us ; and if we be not attentive, will sometimes insinuate very absurd Notions into our Belief. Here therefore our care and labour is required, to bring along with us, to the reading of Holy Scripture, such a sense of God, and of our known Duty to him, and
of

of the end and intention of Religion, that it may be ready at hand, to correct our *extempore* conceits and apprehensions, which will be forward to mislead us. And if they represent any thing to us, which makes Him unjust, or unmerciful; if they plainly lead us to negligence and carelessness in our Duty; if they strike at the *end of the Commandment*, which is, *Charity, out of a pure heart, and a good conscience, and faith unfeigned*; we must as suddenly lay them aside, as they obtrude themselves upon us. For that cannot be the Mind of God, which crosses the Natural Notions we all have of Him; or thwarts the plain Revelations He hath made of his blessed Nature and Will; or tends to make us less diligent in his service, less zealous of good works; unto which we *are created and formed in Christ Jesus, that we should walk in them*, II. *Ephes.* 10.

And we are all concerned to watch carefully, lest any thing of this kind insinuate it self, to the high dishonour of Almighty God, and the infinite hazard of our immortal Souls. And to
watch

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watch not only when we are reading the Holy Scriptures, but

II. *Secondly*, At all other times we must use due care, lest our thoughts lead us to form any Opinions, which are contrary to the known Principles of Humanity, and Christianity.

The thoughts of men are restless; and are apt to cast themselves into a thousand shapes, and frame innumerable conceits. Now if we let any settle in our minds, which agree not with the Truths, I have often named; they will not fail to be intermeddling when we read the Scriptures, and draw it to speak in their favour, contrary to its meaning. There is no private Opinion which we have received, but we are naturally desirous to have it justified and confirmed: and therefore we had need take care to entertain none that are inconsistent with Piety; for they will be sure to catch at every word of Holy Scripture to give them countenance by its great Authority; and press it, against its will, to come to their service. At every turn they will be interposing
their

their inclinations; and prove a bias upon our minds, to carry them aside from the mark.

And the fuller we are of these, and the more desirous to have them confirmed; the more hastily shall we persuade our selves, that the Holy Scripture speaks in their favour: and proffers it self as a Witness, to give Testimony to the truth of our Con-
ceits.

Let us provide therefore by a due vigilance and attentive consideration, that they be not formed by our own private imaginations; but by the common standing Rule of natural Honesty, Justice and Goodness; and by all other certain Principles ingrafted in us, or revealed to us: Which serve as an *Index* to point us which way our thoughts shou'd run; and where they should fix themselves.

II.

THE necessity of which Care is the *second* thing, I propounded to be briefly considered.

And

And here *two* things more may be sufficient to be duly weighed.

First, That without this Care, the plainest Scriptures will be in danger to be perverted, as soon as the most difficult.

Secondly, The very same places of Scripture will be liable to be shamefully wrested, to serve different purposes.

I. *First*, I say the plainest Scriptures will be in danger to be perverted (and very dangerously too) as well as the most difficult. For it is not their difficulty, that makes them be perverted, but mens own easiness to believe any thing, which their private desires would have to be true; though never so contrary to sound Reason and Religion: which if they had regarded, would have directed them to make another construction of Holy Writings.

All the Metaphors, for instance, and resemblances borrowed from things visible, to represent the Glory of Christ's heavenly Kingdom, make the miserable Jews (as their Forefathers did before them) still entertain them-

themselves with pleasant Dreams, of a glorious, pompous Monarchy here on Earth: though the Prophets, in as plain words as can be devised, represent Christ, their King, as a man of sufferings, who should endure greater indignities than any man ever did, and at last dye, and so rise again, to sit at the right hand of God, and give his Holy Spirit from thence, to fill all the Earth with the knowledge of the Lord; and thereby make them pious Subjects of a Divine Kingdom. This drowsiness is so hereditary to their Nation, that they will not be awakened out of their slumber; by considering how much more the Soul is God's care, than the Body; and what the Prophets speak concerning Christ's Government over mens minds and Consciences, and the reformation He should come to make in their life and manners.

Some Christians have been deluded with the same Fancy; as if they had dreamt upon their Pillow.

But there are more palpable instances, of the abuses committed among them, not by reading the Scripture
(for

(for that they were not forbidden) but by not observing the Rule I am now establishing. It was usual for people, even in the ancient Times of Christianity, to interpret the Scripture according to their fancy, merely to serve a present turn; just as many make it do now. For *Tertullian* tells us, that they who, after their Conversion to Christianity, still followed the trade of making *Idols* and *Images* for the Heathen to Worship, defended themselves (when they were reprehended for it) by a Saying in *St. Paul*, 1 *Cor.* VII. 20. which they thus contracted, *Ut quisq; fuerit inventus, ita & perseveret*; As every man is found, when he is called to Christianity, so let him continue.

There is no man that reads what follows, but plainly sees (if he be not resolved to shut his eyes against all that contradicts his desires) the Apostle designs Nothing, but that all men should remain so well satisfied with the condition in which they were when converted to Christ; that if they were mere *Slaves*, they should be content to continue so; and not depart

part from their Lords and Masters, unless they would give them their Liberty: which, he grants, was much to be desired. But if the following words had not told us this is his meaning; yet the Rule before mentioned, would have sufficiently secured them, from the ill use they made of his words: For as *Tertullian* well observes (in his Book of *Idolatry*, Cap. V. where he treats of this matter) it is an Interpretation, that directly leads to all wickedness. *Possumus igitur omnes in peccatis perseverare ex ista interpretatione, &c.* as his words are: We may all then continue in our sins, according to this Interpretation; for there is not one of us, who was not found a Sinner, when he was called into Christ's Service: who came down for no other reason, but to deliver us from our sins.

But in the same manner they also abused, he observes there, some other Texts of *St. Paul*, wherein he required, that after, his Example, every man should work and get his living with his own hands, 1 Cor. IV. 10. 2 Theff. III. 9, 10. By which Precepts, if all that

that men wrought with their hands, might be defended; then Thieves and High-way men, and Coiners of false Money, and all other wicked persons, would be justified by them, as well as these Image-makers, who alledged them. In a word, 'let the Gate of 'the Church be set wide open, saith 'he, for all Corners, who live by their 'labour; if there be no exception of 'such Arts and Trades, as the Disci- 'pline of God doth not receive.

And indeed, the Scripture it self teaches us this Truth, That it is not the difficult places only, which men wrest to their destruction, but the plainest also, when thereby they can have some colour for their evil practices. As for Example, what can be more certain than this, that the Apostle never gave any encouragement by his Doctrine for men to say, much less said thus himself, *Let us do evil, that good may come.* That is, a good End will warrant evil Actions. And yet there were some, who were so audacious, as to affirm he taught this Doctrine: whom he contents himself to confute, with these few words, and vouch-

vouchsafes them no other answer; *Whose damnation is just*, III. Rom. 8. There was no ground, that is, for such an interpretation of his words, but only their own evil Principles and Affections; which led them to make this Conclusion against the dictates of natural Reason and Christianity: and therefore nothing could be said for such men; but they would perish; and Nothing was more just than that God should leave them under Condemnation, who perverted holy Words to a meaning so cross to all the known Principles of natural and revealed Truth, that Nothing could be more.

Occumenius, upon this very Text of *St. Peter*, gives another such like instance, of wresting *St. Paul's* words, which, he saith, may serve instead of all. 'He having said, V. Rom. 20. *Where sin abounded, grace did much more abound*; ungodly men perverting his sense, say, we have *Paul* on our side, who says, ἀμαρτήσωμεν πλέον, ἵνα πλέον συγχωρηθῶμεν, *Let us sin the more abundantly, that we may be the more abundantly pardoned.* Which they

‘they do to their own destruction
 ‘(saith *St. Peter*) for they that killed
 ‘the Prophets and the Apostles, and
 ‘they that destroy and take away their
 ‘words, by a perverse interpretation,
 ‘are obnoxious to one and the same
 ‘Condemnation : because they slew
 ‘them, that the World might be no
 ‘longer taught by them, the saving
 ‘Truths of the Gospel ; and these in
 ‘the like manner wrest, or put upon
 ‘the rack their words, that none by
 ‘them may work out their Salvation.

Again, what is there clearer in the
 Apostolical Writings, than that they
 every where taught, God will raise
 the dead *at the last day* ; in which He
 will judge the World in righteousness.
 And yet there were those who wrest-
 ed these words so foully, that some
 said, the *Resurrection was past already* ;
 of whom were *Hymeneus* and *Philetas*,
 2 *Tim.* II. 17, 18. and others said, there
 was *no Resurrection*, 1 *Cor.* XV. 12.
 and others said, Christ would never
 come again ; but laught at his promi-
 ses of coming to reward the good, and
 at his threatnings of coming to punish
 the wicked, as *St. Peter* tells us in this
 very

very Chapter, v. 3, 4. *Knowing this first, that there shall come in the last days scoffers, walking after their own lusts, (there was the reason of their scoffing) saying, Where is the promise of his coming? for since the first men fell asleep, all things continue as they were from the beginning of the world. Which they would not have had the impudence to affirm (it being so easie to disprove them) had they not affected (as he shows v. 5.) to be ignorant of what was as plainly recorded in the Holy Books, as any thing whatsoever; that there had already been, long ago, a great change made by the Flood, which swept away the World of the Ungodly. Which, if they had been serious, would have kept them from mocking, at another destruction threatned to the Wicked, with a promise of Salvation to the Godly, at our Saviour's second Coming: and made them look upon what was past, as an Example of the like future Judgment.*

I might give more numerous instances, which would prove something beyond this; that unpurged minds, or, which is all one, unlearned and
unstable

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unstable Souls, will not only wrest plain Truths to serve their Lusts and Humours: but thereby be apt to grow more wicked, and more prejudiced against God and Goodness. For *the opinion, or presumption* (as is excellently observed by a great Man) *that any of our evil actions, or dispositions, are countenanced from God's Word, doth mightily heighten them, in a degree of evil more than usual.*

The covetous, niggardly, and unmerciful, for instance, if they please themselves, in the precepts of frugality and diligence; are exceedingly stiffened and rooted in those sins, with the pleasure they take in their conceited conformity with the rule of Gods Word: which teacheth us to avoid Riot and Luxury, Sloth and Negligence. And thus the stubborn and self-willed, are encouraged in their obstinacy, by the commendations which are given to the constant and the well-resolved. And the malicious, turbulent, and seditious Spirits, justify their bitterness, fury, and contempt of Authority, from the examples of excessive zeal, or indignation swelling in Holy men upon just

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occa-

occasions, and that, perhaps, by a special Divine incitation; which is not by any man to be now imitated.

But it is time to leave this; and to give a short account of the other.

II. It is no less usual, for want of observing this plain Rule, to press one and the self same Scripture, to serve for different purposes: unto the great dishonour of God, and of his Holy Oracles; which men, from hence, imagine have an uncertain found.

I might instance in some very ancient abuses of this nature; As that of our Saviour's, *X. Matth. 25. It is enough for the Disciple, that he be as his Master*, may be strained to prove no body knows how many absurdities. You may guess at the rest by this one, that it was alledged by the *Ebionites*, to prove that Christians ought to be circumcised, because Christ their Master was (as *Epiphanius* expressly remembers) and by the same reason may be urged to prove, that no Christian ought to marry, because Christ their Master never married. But

But there are modern instances, more than enough, of this; such as show, that not only ignorant people, but the most instructed in humane Learning, wrest the Scriptures notoriously, if they keep not close to Principles of known Morality and Piety.

From those two words, *Pasce oves, Feed my sheep*, I know not how many things are endeavoured to be established, by the Doctors of the *Roman Church*. If you ask how they prove the Popes Monarchy and Supreme Dominion in the Church, the Answer is, Christ said to *Peter, Simon bar-Jona, Feed my sheep*; i. e. saith *Bellarmino, regio more impera*, command after a Regal manner. If you ask again by what Right he challenges to be the Supreme Judge in Controversies of Faith, which anciently was thought to belong to General Councils out of the Word of God, the same Doctor tells you it is evident from the same words, *Feed my sheep*. Hence he proves also his Infallibility, or that he cannot err in matters of Faith, because Christ said, *Feed my sheep*. Nay, by the same words, a fourth Prerogative

is established, which is a power to make new Articles of Faith, if he think good. They are alledged also for a *fifth* purpose, to prove that he hath a Treasure made up of the Merits of Christ, and of the Saints, which he dispenses as he pleases to the Faithful; for so the same Doctor teaches in his Book of Indulgences, because Christ said to *Peter*, *Feed my sheep*.

By which wonderful words also, he and others labour to prove, that the Pope can transfer Kingdoms, absolve Subjects from the Oath of Allegiance, and depose them from their Thrones. And *Becanus* from the same words still gathers, that he may inflict temporal Punishments, as they call them, not excepting death, upon those Princes that are disobedient to him.

So strangely are men bent to force the meaning of Holy Writ, though they have never so good Parts, and great Learning; when they have once forsaken the guidance of Common Sense, and the obvious Notions of Christianity. Nay, the more witty they are, the worse they are; if they have lost their Conscience, and keep
not

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not strictly to the first Principles of all Religion.

There is another Example to be given of this, of the same Nature. From those words, *Thou art Peter, and upon this Rock I will build my Church, &c.* one is content to prove no more but this, that the *Universal Church cannot err*: but another from hence affirms, that the *Tradition of the present Church cannot err*: which will not satisfy others, who conclude from the same words, that the *Pope cannot err*: and there are those who alledge them to prove that a *General Council cannot err*. These words cannot alike serve all these purposes (as our Divines rightly have observed) for a Pope may err, where a Council doth not; and a General Council may err, where the truly Catholick Church cannot. And therefore it is not the evidence of things, which leads men thus to expound the Holy Scriptures; but their own private affections, and their several interests and designs, to the advancement of which they easily consent to apply them: Not attending to the clear scope of them; or rather

Shutting their eyes, not only to that, but to the main scope of the whole Book of God, and to all other Notices, which would give them better direction. And solve also, even many seeming difficulties, which are in the Scripture; or, at least, guide us so evenly, that we shall pass safely by them.

Which is the *third* General Truth, I propounded in the beginning of this Part of my Discourse.

III.

AMONG all those things, which we are concerned to learn, there are none thought more difficult than several passages in *St. Paul's* Epistles: some part of which *St. Peter* had in his eye, when he concluded his Second Epistle. But I may be confident, that if we will admit, or take up, no sense of them, that is contrary to such known and confessed Truths, as are on all sides embraced, we may give a fair account of them; at least, preserve our selves from making any dangerous construction of them.

That

That which above all the rest is thought to be of greatest difficulty, is his *Doctrine of Election and Reprobation*: which some take to be the things hard to be understood in St. Paul's Epistles. But if we stick close to the known fixed Principles of Reason and Religion, which are naturally written on our Hearts, or revealed by our Saviour, we shall be led thereby unto a fair and easie interpretation of his meaning in these matters.

For there is an Election of whole Nations, and there is an Election of particular Persons: and they are elected either to enjoy the means of Grace, or to partake of Eternal Salvation.

The first of these, it is evident, are absolute, and have no dependence upon any thing we do: but the latter are not; as St. Paul expressly teaches us, 2 *Thess.* II. 13. where he saith, God had chosen them to Salvation, through Sanctification of the Spirit, and belief of the Truth. Faith was supposed to this, and the fruits of Faith, in Sanctity and Holiness. They were not chosen to Salvation but through

these ; though they were chosen to be made partakers of the Grace of the Gospel before these.

The like may be said concerning *Reprobating*, or rejecting men. Which sometimes plainly concerns whole Nations ; and sometimes particular Persons : and sometimes is only from the Priviledges they formerly enjoyed ; sometimes from Eternal Life ; both of them for their sins ; and the former (the National rejection from their former Priviledges) is designed by God to prevent the latter ; *viz.* the final destruction of every one of them, which he doth not desire.

Thus God reprobated , or rejected and cast away *Israel*, as St. Paul teaches in the Epistle to the *Romans* : But it was not with an intention that they should utterly perish. No, he saith more than once, *God forbid : i. e.* he abhorred such a thought ; he disclaimed any such meaning. For , quite contrary, by their being rejected from enjoying the Priviledges they formerly had , the Gentiles were brought to Christianity : and the end of that, was to *provoke the Jews also to jealousy ;*
and

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and move them at last to bethink themselves better, and to repent of their sin and be saved

Let any man read seriously the *Tenth* and *Eleventh* Chapters of that Epistle, and he will be satisfied that the Reprobation spoken of in the *Ninth* Chapter, was such; that they might notwithstanding be restored into the favour of God, and be finally saved. That is, they were rejected from being his peculiar people, as they had been: but not from all hope of his Mercy, if they did not continue a *disobedient and gainsaying people*. For the Apostle still prays for them, in the entrance of the *Tenth* Chapter: and begins the *Eleventh* in this manner, *I say then, Hath God cast away his people? God forbid.* That is, will any man infer then, from what I have said, that God hath utterly reprobated them, never to receive them more? No such matter; none ought to interpret my words to such a sense; which I disown; nor did it ever come into my mind. For I my self am an instance of the contrary; being an *Israelite, of the seed of Abraham, of the tribe of Benjamin, &c.* H 5 And

And yet he saith afterward, that God had blinded their eyes, and given them a spirit of slumber, eyes that they should not see, and ears that they should not hear; according to that of David, *Let their table be made a snare and a trap and a stumbling-block, &c.* v. 8, 9, 10.

But what then? *Have they stumbled that they should fall*, and be utterly ruined? God forbid: but rather through their fall Salvation is come to the Gentiles, to provoke them to jealousy, v. 11. For if they did not abide still in Unbelief, he shows they might be grafted into the Church again, v. 23. And explains his mind still more fully in this matter, v. 25. that blindness was hapned only in part to Israel, till the fulness of the Gentiles was come in: and so all Israel shall be saved.

For though they were, as concerning the Gospel, Enemies for our sake; yet, as touching the Election, they were beloved for the Fathers sake. They were not absolutely and finally reprobated; but for the present did not believe, that through the Mercy showed to us Gentiles; they might
also

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also obtain Mercy. For God concluded them all in Unbelief, that he might have mercy upon all, v. 28, 31, 32.

All these expressions, and a number more in that Chapter, evidently demonstrate, it was not an irrecoverable Rejection, which the Apostle speaks of; much less a Rejection without any respect to their sins; but such a Rejection for their rejecting Christ, as in the design of God, was to bring them to Repentance, and to Faith in Christ; when they saw what they had lost (and others had gained) by their Infidelity.

He now that will interpret the *Ninth* Chapter, according to the plain, declared sense of the Apostle in this, will have no hard work to undertake: but easily see that as he speaks of the whole body of the Jewish Nation, so he did not think them to be utterly lost; but designed even their Reprobation for their recovery.

And now I might proceed to show (if it would not enlarge this Treatise too much) how the difficulties which

are

are raiscd' about Faith and Works, are not so great neither as they seem; if we firmly adhere to common Truths. Which lead every man to conclude, that the Faith which enters us into a state of Justification, doth include in it an hearty purpose of well-doing: and that, being thus entred, we cannot continue in that state, unless (according to our holy purpose) we bring forth the fruit of good Works.

And, in like manner, what he saith of *God's hardening mens hearts*, is not difficult to be understood by those, who are not unlearned and unstable: but are skilful in the Principles of natural Knowledge and of true Christianity; and who are rooted in them so, that they hold them fast, whatsoever expressions there may be, that seem to contradict them.

But it is time to draw towards a Conclusion of this Treatise; which shall end as it began. The Doctrine of this Church, it appears, is most pure and sincere in this Point; and most conformable to what we find delivered by the holy Doctors of Christianity, in the best Ages. And therefore

fore no Member of it ought to be persuaded, for any reason, to lay aside the reading of the Holy Scriptures; when there is a more pious course to which they themselves direct us. Which is, to learn those things well, which we cannot misapprehend, if we mind them; and which will keep us from misapprehending all other things, if we stick to them, and will not desert them.

Let that be your first business, to learn all *General* Truths, which comprehend the *Particular* in them. And when you have learnt them, receive no particular Opinion, which crosses those general Truths; for you may be sure it is false: because one Truth cannot cross another; and all Conclusions must be judged by the prime Truths, which ought to stand unmoveable.

But above all, let us establish those Truths in our minds and hearts, which teach us to be good. For there is no Dispute about this, that we ought to be devoutly Religious, and sober, and just, and temperate in all things: meek also, humble, patient, ready
to

to do good, and to forgive. And if we exercise our selves continually in the practice of these, and such like Vertues, which are evidently taught us in the Holy Books; they will preserve us from making any ill use of any thing we read there: and teach us to turn all we read, into our nourishment and increase in true Godliness.

Hear the First *Homily* of our Church; in the conclusion of it.

In reading God's Word, he most profiteth not always, that is most ready in turning of the Book, or in saying of it without Book; but he that is most turned into it, that is most inspired with the Holy Ghost, most in his heart and life altered and changed into that thing which he readeth: he that is daily less and less proud, less wrathful, less covetous, and less desirous of worldly and vain pleasures: he that daily (forsaking his old vicious life) increaseth in Vertue more and more. And to be short, there is nothing that more maintaineth Godliness of mind, and driveth away Ungodliness, than doth the continual reading or hearing of God's Word; if it be joynd with a godly mind, and a good affe-

II.
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*affection, to know and follow God's Will.
For without a single eye, pure intent,
and good mind, nothing is allowed for
good before God.*

O B J E C T I O N.

THE great Objection against all that hath been said is, That notwithstanding these Directions, Lay-men, we see, do abuse the Holy Scriptures; and which is more, the reading of them hath bred infinite Heresies: and therefore the safest course is to forbid them to be read by the common people.

A N S W E R I.

TO the first part of which, an Answer hath been returned already, That there is nothing in the World so useful and necessary, but it is liable to be abused; and yet it must not therefore be kept out of the hands of vulgar people, for their common benefit. What more useful, nay necessary than fire; and yet malicious, or negligent people, may burn the best house that
is

is with it , which they should only warm.

But besides this , I have one short Reply more to make : That none have been more guilty of abusing the Holy Scripture , than they who ought to have been Guides to the Church and People of God , by a sound interpretation thereof. Examples of which I am not disposed to name , unless any shall be so untoward as to deny it : and then a great many may be produced, like to that of him, who because *Moses said, If a beast touch the mountain, let it be stoned*, concluded that no simple or unlearned man , ought to presume to meddle with the sublimity of the Holy Scripture.

A hard case this, that vulgar people should be treated like Beasts : but thus Learned men will misinterpret Scripture, when they are inclined only to serve their Cause ; and be as forward (if they be not disinterested) to mislead the people , as the people are to mislead themselves.

ANSWER

ANSWER II.

TO the other part of the Objection, I shall give something fuller satisfaction.

I. And first of all, it is not true that all Heresies have sprung from mens reading the Scriptures, or from their misunderstanding them: but rather from their not reading them, as *St. Chrysostom*, you have heard, was of opinion; whose words I have quoted more than once, in the first Part of this Discourse. Which are of the same import with those of our Saviour, *XXII. Matth. 29. Ye do err, not knowing the Scriptures, and the power of God.* That is, not being acquainted with what natural Reason taught concerning God's Omnipotency, as well as what the Scripture taught about the Resurrection.

Here it may be fit to observe these four things.

First, That the Fathers observe, all the ancient Hereticks did not read the Scripture. They are the words of
St.

St. *Austin*, Lib. III. Cap. 9. *De Genesi ad literam*. For neither do all Hereticks read the Catholick Scriptures: nor are they Hereticks for any other reason, but because they not understanding them aright, pertinaciously assert their own false Opinions against their Truth. And thus St. *Hierom* in the last words of his Commentary upon the VII. of *Hosea*. All the questions of the Hereticks and of the Gentiles are the same; because they follow not the Authority of the Scriptures, but the sense of humane Reason.

Secondly, They observe, that the men who pretended most to this, were the Original of Heresies, viz. the Philosophers. Thus *Tertullian*, in his first Book against *Marcion*, speaking of the Professors of Wisdom, saith, *De quorum ingeniis omnis hæresis animatur*, From whose Wits all Heresie is begotten and encouraged. And more fully in his Book of *Prescriptions*, Cap. 7. *Ipsa deniq; hæreses à Philosophia animantur*, Heresies themselves had life given them from Philosophy. For the *Æones* came out of the School of *Plato*: *Marcion's* God came from the *Stoicks*: and the Souls Mortality
‘from

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‘from the *Epicureans* : and the denial
‘of the Resurrection of the Body, was
‘taken from one School of all the
‘Philosophers. And so he proceeds,
‘showing how the *Fables*, the *endless*
‘*Genealogies*, the *unprofitable questions*,
‘and *Disputings* mentioned in the Scri-
‘ptures, came out of the same Forge :
‘and that the Apostle takes notice of
‘it, when he gives the *Colossians* a Ca-
‘veat against *vain Philosophy*, II. Col.
‘8. From whence we may note, that
the Scriptures themselves assign the
Original of Heresies, and teach us to
beware of it ; so far are they from
leading us into them.

Thirdly, And there is a *third* Cause
of them mentioned in Scripture also,
viz. the Traditions of men, VII. Mark
7, 8. And thus *Firmilian* observes in
his Letter to St. *Cyprian*, That *Mar-*
cion, the Disciple of *Cerdo*, a great
while after the Apostles, *induxit*
sacrilegam adversus Deum traditionem,
brought in a sacrilegious Tradition
against God : *Apelles* also, consent-
ing to his Blasphemy, added *mul-*
ta alia nova, many other Novelties ;
which were more grievous, and di-
rectly

rectly opposite to Faith and Truth. And so did *Valentinus* and *Basilides*, who rebelled against God's Church, by their wicked Forgeries.

And thus St. *Hierom* introduces Hereticks maintaining their Errours, in the very Dialect of the now Roman Doctors; *We are the Sons of those wise men, who from the beginning delivered unto us the Apostolical Doctrine, &c. Lib. VII. in Esaiam, Cap. XIX.* But S. *Cyprian* every where appeals from all pretended Tradition whatsoever, unto the Dictates of our Lord and his Apostles, i. e. unto Scripture-Tradition. Particularly, in that famous Epistle of his to *Pompeius*; *All religious and simple minds have a compendious means, both to lay aside Error, and to find out Truth: nam si ad divinæ traditionis caput & originem revertamur, cessat error humanus; for if we go back to the Head and Original of Divine Tradition, there is an end of humane Error.* And a little after, he tells us what he means by this Divine Tradition, when he saith, *If there be any doubt, any wavering about the Truth, let us return, ad originem Dominicam, & Evan-*

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& Evangelicam & Apostolicam Traditionem, to our Lord's Original, or beginning, both the Evangelical, and Apostolical Traditions: that is, to the Doctrines delivered in the Gospels, and in the Writings of the Apostles.

Fourthly, Another Spring of Heresie were pretended Revelations. Thus the *Cataphryga*, as the same *Firmilian* tells us; & *novas Prophetias usurpare conantur*, endeavoured also to make use of new Prophecies. And a little after, *We know they cannot have Christ, who challenge to themselves their false Prophecy, against the Faith of Christ.* And whence they had their Illuminations, who, in the bosom of the Roman Church, invented a *Fifth Gospel* (which threatned the overthrow of our *four*) is not hard to resolve. Not out of the Holy Scriptures, we may be sure: and therefore the taking away them from the people, will not prevent all Heresies; but they will start up, as they have done, from other Causes: and they will the sooner start up, if the Scriptures be neglected.

II. But

II. But I desire it may be further considered, that as Heresies will spring up from other Causes, though men do not read the Scriptures: so *Laymen* have not been always the Devils of them; but they to whom none deny the liberty of reading the Holy Books. For the most pernicious Heresies, that have been in the Church, had their beginning from Priests; as appears by *Arius* and *Nestorius*. And indeed no man can frame an Heresie, but he that is of excellent Parts, as *St. Hierom's* opinion is; whose words are these upon the X. of *Hosea*. 'No
' man can devise and set up a Heresie,
' but he that is *ardentis ingenii*, of an
' extraordinary Wit; and hath gifts
' of Nature, created by God the great
' Artificer: such was *Valentinus*, such
' was *Marcion*; whom we read to have
' been most learned; such was *Bardesanes*, whose Wit the Philosophers
' themselves admired. And therefore, either the Scriptures must be wholly laid aside, the greatest men, for Learning and Parts, being apt to abuse them, if they be not humble and thoroughly

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roughly good : or men must be taught how to prepare themselves for the reading of them, and what to seek for there ; and then any body may safely take them into their hands, and make them their constant Companions.

III. It must likewise be further considered , that there is something else to be feared beside Heresie ; and that is stupid ignorance , or gross Infidelity : which, Experience shows us, have followed upon the taking the Scriptures from the people ; even as darkness comes and covers the Earth, when the light is withdrawn from it. And ought we not, in all reason , to be as studious and solicitous , to prevent these , as to prevent Heresie ? Since they are no less dangerous , or rather more dangerous by far : even for this reason, because they make men liable to fall into the most sottish Superstitions ; if not into down-right Idolatry ; which is a worse thing than Heresie.

How *Images* came to be Laymens Books, it is needless to relate (the matter being very plain) and
how

how *Image-Worship* thence arose ; and how fatal this hath been to the vulgar people, I have not room to discourse : nor how *Legends of Saints* were invented, full of absurd and incredible stories, which have disgraced the Doctrine of Christianity , and tempted many to disbelieve the true History of our Saviour's and his Apostles Miraculous Operations. But this is certain , that they were devised to supply the place of the Holy Scriptures ; that the people might have something to entertain them , when they were taken away from them. It was the effect, at least, of that ; these fabulous stories being recommended to the peoples affection, when they were frightened from meddling with the Bible , as a dangerous Book : nay, when it's credit was disgraced by many words of reproach. Which we in this Church think our selves bound to wipe off, by recommending it to the peoples best affection and constant perusal ; as a means to preserve them from sottish ignorance , and stupid Impostures, and all vain Superstitions, and false Worship.

IV. Nor

IV. Nor is it easie for our people by this means to fall into Heresie; because they have the liberty of reading the Scriptures, but interpreted to them by the Ministry of the Church (whereby they are taught continually to have recourse to their Pastors) and by sundry Tracts, Expositions, and Paraphrases, allowed by publick Authority: Particularly, in the beginning of the Reformation, care was taken that *Erasmus* his Paraphrase, should be placed in every Parish-Church of the Realm; in which he doth not follow his own private Fancy; but, like a truly great Man, represents the sense of the ancient Doctors of the Church.

V. Now if after all this, men do fall into Heresie, it must be imputed to some other Cause, than their reading the Scriptures. For if they had minded them, they wou'd have learnt to be humble, modest, peaceable, tractable to their Guides; and to take heed of those who cause Divisions, and are proud, and dote about Questions

I

stions and strifes of Words ; and that creep into houses to insill private Doctrines, and, very frequently, lead men from the Scriptures, to pretended Revelations or Traditions. That is, they would not have fallen into any sort of Heresie ; but kept *unto the wholesom words of our Lord Jesus Christ, and to the Doctrine which is according unto Godliness.* Unto which, if men will not attend, there is no remedy ; they will fall into Heresies, or worse ; whether they read the Scriptures, or read them not. The Scripture it self tells us as much, that *there must be Heresies,* 1 Cor. XI. 19. that is, God will not hinder it, unless men will be guided by him, and be truly good : But he hath a very good end, as it there follows, in permitting it ; which is, that it may be manifest, who are honest-hearted Christians, sincerely in love with Truth and Goodness, and who are not.

And that must be the care of every good man, not to take or throw away the Scriptures, to prevent Heresies : but, if Heresies do arise, to endeavour (according to the direction
of

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of the Scriptures) to approve his integrity unto God, by stedfast continuance in Faith and Holiness.

And after the same manner must he govern himself, if the Guides of his Soul do not perform their Duty. Which I shall represent in the words of *Erasmus*; out of his *Preface* to the Reader, before his Annotations on the New Testament.

‘It is the Pastors Office to distribute
‘the Bread of Life to the people. But
‘what if they do not their Duty?
‘What must the people do?

‘They must implore the help of the
‘Supreme Pastor Christ Jesus; who
‘still lives, and hath not forsaken the
‘care of his Flock: But being solicited by the publick Prayers of his
‘People, will do what is promised in
‘*Ezekiel*; Behold, I will both search my
‘sheep, and seek them out. As a shepherd seeketh out his flock, in the day
‘that they are scattered: so will I seek
‘out my sheep, and will deliver them
‘out of all places, where they have been
‘scattered in the cloudy and dark day;
‘with all the rest that there follows
‘XXX. *Ezek.* 12, 13, &c.

' The vulgar people are Sheep; but
 ' endued with reason : and out of those
 ' Sheep are Pastors made. And some-
 ' times it falls out, that a Sheep may
 ' know more than his Pastor. As a
 ' Lay-man therefore ought not sediti-
 ' ously to rebel against the Priests, lest
 ' that order be confounded, which St.
 ' *Paul* would have in the Body of
 ' Christ : so the Priests ought not to
 ' exercise Tyranny over the Flock of
 ' Christ ; for if they do, the Sedition
 ' will lye at their door.

' When the Pastors do their duty,
 ' they are to be reverently heard as
 ' Angels of God, by whom Christ
 ' speaks to us. And when they teach
 ' unsincerely, the people must pick out
 ' all that's good, if there be any mix-
 ' ed with it. But if they teach not at
 ' all, or teach those things that are
 ' plainly repugnant to the Gospel, let
 ' every man refresh his Soul with pri-
 ' vate reading. And Christ, who pro-
 ' mises to be present when two or three
 ' are gathered together *in his Name*,
 ' will not be wanting, by his Spirit, to
 ' one Soul that meditates piously in his
 ' Holy Word.

' In

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‘In vain are six thousand gathered
‘together, if it be not *in his Name*.
‘Now they are gathered together in
‘Christ’s Name, who have respect to
‘Nothing but his Glory, and the eter-
‘nal Salvation of their Souls.

CONCLUSION.

I shall conclude all with the sense
of that great Man, St. *Athanasius* :
who wrote a little Treatise on pur-
pose, to reprove the audaciousness
(as he calls it) of those, who said that
it was needless to look into the Scri-
ptures; and bad men *not to search into*
them, nor to speak out of them, but to
content themselves with the Faith they
had received. For searching into the
Scriptures, (said they) doth but make
things more obscure.

To which he replies many things,
which I might digest into Heads; but
I shall present them to the Reader just
as they lie in the *Second Tome* of his
Works, pag. 295. of the *Paris Edi-*
tion, MDCXXVII.

This very Assertion, saith he, shows
the inconsistency of their Doctrine, and

that it hath Nothing to support it. He means, they would not be afraid men should search into the Scriptures, if they thought, what was taught by them, would be there justified.

But we trust to the truth of the Mystery (i. e. the Scripture) and to the help of him who cannot lye, who saith, Every one that seeks shall find.

Therefore we seek as we ought; and we find what we ought; and we speak with demonstration; and we hear with a genuine intention: that we may persuade our domesticks; and that we may confute our Adversaries; and that we may by our search be gainers our selves; and not propound any thing that is inconsistent unto others.

Would you have me neglect the Scriptures? Whence then should I have knowledge? Would you not have me to mind knowledge? But whence then should I have Faith? Paul cries, How should they believe, unless they hear? And again, Faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God. He then who forbids the Word, obstructs hearing, and throws out Faith.

*No man can be ignorant of the Roman
Laws*

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Laws (being a Member of the Empire) without danger. They then who forbid us to study and learn the great Oracles of the King of Heaven, what kind of mischief do they not craftily contrive against us?

The Scripture is the food of the Soul. Cease then, O man, to starve the inward man, and to kill it with hunger: introducing a famine, not of bread nor of water, but of hearing the Word of the Lord.

There is one that inflicts wounds; and dost thou forbid the application of medicines? For shame do not talk, as if the various wisdom in the Books of Physicians, were vain and to no purpose. One may as well, he means, bid people not mind their Prescriptions, though there be many Diseases in the World, as not read the Scriptures, when their Souls are in danger.

Reverence that Lover of God's Word, the Eunuch: who did not neglect reading upon the road. Whose good intentions our Lord accepting, sent him straightway an Instructor; who made him understand what he read, and, by the Scriptures, brought him to his Saviour.

Hence

Hence it is that our Saviour commands, Search the Scriptures : by searching, meaning careful and sober inquiry into hidden things.

Out of the Scriptures, is the manifestation of things obscure; the confirmation of hope; the event of promises; the finding of our Saviour : according to that, We have found Him, of whom Moses and the Prophets wrote.

Paul himself uses Scriptures for the establishment of the Truth. And if he that heard ineffable things, he that was thoroughly instructed in secrets, he that had Christ speaking in him, doth not simply use his own private Authority, without the testimony of the Scriptures : how can we with safety now neglect the Divine Legislation, and speak what we think good out of our own hearts ?

But there are some things transcending our Conceptions. I say so too : and this we learn out of the Scriptures ; that we may understand what things are fit for us to seek after, as being attainable.

For it is neither pious to venture upon all things : nor is it consistent with Holiness, to neglect all things.

What we worship, we ought all to be
acquaint-

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acquainted withal : according to that which is written, We know what we worship. But how great, or what kind, or after what manner, or where, it is the part of mad-men to inquire.

They that would have none to judge of their Doctrines but themselves, deter men from reading the Scriptures ; pretending it is immodest to pry into such inaccessible things : but in truth, fearing to be convinced out of them, of holding bad Opinions.

I omit the rest, which is but little more than I have represented ; and shall end all with his words to *Maccarius*, in the very beginning of his Works, against the Gentiles ; *The holy and divinely inspired Scriptures, are sufficient of themselves for the declaration of the Truth ; and there are many Books composed about the same things, by our Teachers of blessed Memory : Which if any man peruse, he will know, in some measure, the meaning of the Scriptures, and be able to attain the knowledge he desires.*

The End of the Third Part.

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